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A blue mascot in a blue library . . . p.18

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Ancient landscapes, new sounds . . . p.12

Eight flags over the Arctic

Harry der Nederlanden

There's only one flag that has been planted literally, of course – Russia's titanium flag planted under the arctic ice. But that action has started flag-waving in several other countries with claims on the arctic – Canada, the U.S., Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland. But the titanium flag seems to have given Russia a distinct advantage. Everyone else is now playing catch-up, undoubtedly manufacturing their own titanium flags.

The Russians sent out a well-equipped scientific expedition that included two manned minisubs. I don't suppose anyone actually got out and planted the flag like in the days of Jacques Cartier to claim the submerged continent in the name of Emperor Putin. But the Russians have hinged a great deal of significance on the symbolic act.

All the other claimants denied that the action had any meaning whatsoever, legal or otherwise, but the action created a furore anyway. The reactions of Canada and Denmark were immediate and emphatic, tinged with more anxiety than a meaningless act would warrant. And all those with claims on the arctic region trotted out their scientific and legal experts.

It was only a couple of years ago that our cartoonists and comics were having fun with the brouhaha between Canada and Denmark over tiny Han Island off the coast of Greenland. But when the Russian bear roars near the North Pole, things become serious.

With the thinning of the ice cover in the Arctic, territory that was once inaccessible to oil drilling and other kinds of mining might open up in the next couple of decades. According to one estimate bandied about in all the news stories, the arctic may contain 25 percent of the world's oil and natural gas deposits. No one, however, seems to know how those estimates were arrived at.

The Russian expedition was not just a flag planting expedition, however, it was a scientific expedition which claims to have proof that the Lomonosov Ridge, a 1,500 km undersea mountain range is an extension of Russian territory. By the law of the sea, every country has economic rights that extend 200 miles (320 km) beyond its coastline. But if a country can demonstrate that its coastal shelf extends further that boundary may be extended. Denmark, however, has argued that the Lomonosov Ridge is an extension of its territory. The Russian expedition leader, who was welcomed back as a hero, declared: "The arctic always was Russian, and it will remain Russian."

However, in 2001 Russia submitted documents to the UN that made similar claims about the Lomonosov Ridge, but at that time its claims was rejected. They quickly assembled this latest expedition to collect further support for their claim. Denmark is also mounting an expedition. The arctic covers some 1.4 million sq km and includes over 36,500 islands. Most of this territory is not in dispute, of course, and much of it will remain inaccessible for a long, long time to come.

The Northwest Passage

The dispute over the north has lent new urgency to Canada's sovereignty over what it regards as its northern territories. The arctic thaw may eventually make the long sought-after Northwest Passage a reality. Canada claims the route as part of its inland waters, but the U.S. has never recognized that claim, insisting that they are to be regarded as part of the high seas and therefore freely accessible to all. If the route ever becomes navigable for regular shipping, it would cut off some 7,000 km from the present route between Europe and Asia, which now passes through the Panama Canal.

Territorial sovereignty, it seems, is not just a matter of drawing a boundary on a map. Even by law, there's an element of power that is recognized. If Canada is not actually exercising any form of control over this area, its claim that this is part of Canada is weakened. P.M. Harper has reiterated the international principle on various occasions to stress the urgency of Canadian action: "Use it or lose it!"

In the recent past U.S., Russian and British subs have been zig-zagging through the Northwest Passage without asking Canada's permission, and by and large Canada has not objected. By and large Canada had no way of telling they were even there. The U.S. sent a huge icebreaker through in 1985 without precipitating much of a diplomatic row. The U.S. has never signed the Law of the Sea Convention that Canada claims gives it the right to regulate the icy waters.

Eric Posner, professor of law at the University of Chicago, finds the U.S. stance short sighted. Writing in the Wall Street Journal, he suggested that power may play a bigger role than science or UN tribunals. "Power, not international law," he said, "will settle the issue." that principle is even written into law, he says. If you cannot exercise control or sovereignty over an area, your claim to it is dubious."

Posner goes on to argue that it is in the world's best interest that Canada control the Northwest Passage. However, it is too weak to asert such control without help from the U.S. In face of the aggressive actions taken by Russia, he calls on the U.S. to set aside its rivalry with Canada and to support it. The Bush administration

See **Flags** *on p. 3*

Icebreaker and Oceanographic research ship CCGS Sir Wilfrid Laurier (Canada) based in Victoria, BC.

News

Darfur: steps toward peace – perhaps

Harry der Nederlanden

The story of the ongoing genocide in western Sudan began appearing in newspapers over three years ago (as peace negotiations were winding up in the south). Only now has the UN at last authorized the sending of troops into the region. (It authorised similar numbers a year ago, but backed off when Khartoum said No go.) Over the last three years more than 200,000 people have died and been subjected to all manner of horror. More than 2.1 million have been turned into internal refugees. The unrest has expanded over a larger area and has even extended into neighboring Chad, causing further fighting and dislocation.

At the end of July the UN authorised sending 26,000 people into the region, 19,000 of them soldiers, to be recruited primarily from Africa. How long it will take for this huge contingent to arrive and who will supply these troops is far from clear. The watered-down UN resolution, moreover, does not permit the troops to disarm anyone. They are there only as monitors and peacekeepers.

Some 7,000 African Union soldiers have already been stationed in Darfur, but they have been poorly equipped, poorly supported and largely ineffectual. At times humanitarian aid had to be stopped in certain areas for the safety of the workers. The threat came not just from the Janjaweed – the Arab raiders backed by the Sudanese government – but also from the fractious rebel groups.

The Sudan, backed by China (motivated by oil interests), has till now stubbornly refused to admit UN troops. The "breakthrough" came when the UN resolution was watered down to limit drastically the amount of force the troops are allowed to use. That will be a huge hindrance. As will be the fact that the area is very arid, with few roads, no troop facilities, so that supplying all these troops with food and water and keeping them operational will be a huge and expensive undertaking. And the troops can't be deployed before that structure is in place.

Moreover, Khartoum has made agreements and peace deals before without doing much to honor them. Almost three years ago, Khartoum agreed to disarm the Janjaweed, but experts determined that the flow of arms to the Arabs only increased.

The Darfur mission, if it gets launched according to plan, will be the UN's largest peacekeeping mission – complicated by the fact that there is not yet a peace to keep. Both the Janjaweed and the rebel groups are still armed and active. The UN troops are only allowed to protect civilians (and themselves) without usurping the authority of the government of Sudan. How that will work out is anybody's guess. Many have already questioned the workability of the complicated command structure, which leaves African commanders on the ground with a great deal of leeway to ignore orders from the UN.

But Darfur is not only the product of a diabolical alliance between the Sudanese government and the Janajaweed to suppress and destroy the Darfurians. As Jeffrey Sachs argues (pointing to a UN report), the problems in Sudan are not only political, religious and ethnic, but geography, climate and population growth have also played a crucial role. Nomadic and farming peoples are competing for space and water. The people of Darfur don't only need peace; they also need help developing their land to make life there sustainable.

Sixteen year old "Moro" is reputed to be one of the fiercest fighters from the rebel battalion based in Muzbat, a North Darfuri village now transformed into a Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) base. Unlike his jovial comrades, Moro has the stern look of a hardened soldier. He wears a bullet casing tightly wrapped in leather and dangling from his necklace. "As long as I wear this [the military and Janjaweed] can't kill me," he said. What has made him so fierce? "Circumstances," he says bluntly. "Because they burned our homes and stole our property."

Shalom to get a green toupee

Jeremy Buesink

Its name is Peace, and now the tranquility that already beguiles those who reside at Grimsby's Shalom Manor and Shalom Garden's will exist not only within the interior walls and the exterior grounds and landscape, but it will also dwell upon the rooftop of these long-term care and assisted living facilities. Shalom Manor and Shalom Gardens, after much planning, have embarked upon a project that will not only embellish the peaceful setting that already exists on its grounds, but will produce results that will benefit the environment as well.

The Rooftop Greening Project will cover over 3000 square metres of the roof of Shalom Manor and Shalom Gardens with sedums, grasses, and herbs therefore transforming a once lifeless rooftop into a garden oasis. The first phase of the project began in July 2007 and the second phase is planned for spring and summer of 2008. The benefits of this project are many. Environmental benefits include the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and reduction of storm water runoff (thus avoiding flooding, pollution, and stream bank erosion). There are economic advantages such as savings on heating and cooling costs by insulating the building below. As well, estimates are that it will double the life of the roof. But perhaps the most immediate of its benefits for those who live, work, and visit Shalom are the therapeutic effects. The year-round colour and beauty provided by the rooftop gardens will provide an attraction for birds and butterflies and offer a peacefulness and beauty that will help in the process of healing and relaxation for residents. This fits in with Shalom's holistic philosophy of care for the body, mind, and spirit.

ZinCo Canada Inc. has been chosen to take this project to fruition. ZinCo will plant sedums, grasses, and herbs at a quantity of 14 plants per square metre with a growing medium depth of 6-12 centimetres. The scope of the work for phase one is 240 square metres. It will include root barrier, moisture and protection mat, drainage layer, system filter, plant material, gravel, inspection chambers, and aluminium separation element. Upon completion, after care and maintenance will include weeding, fertilizing, replacing dead plants if necessary, spring or fall clean-up, and inspection of drain outlets which is vital because maintaining a functioning drainage layer is critical to the establishment of the vegetation as retained water will stagnate and is detrimental to proper plant growth. The second phase of the project will begin in 2008 and it is planned to cover 2985 square metres.

This is not the first project of its kind and those behind this endeavour can be confident in the positive results that have been seen in similar rooftop undertakings. When the Metro Health Hospital in Wyoming, Grand Rapids planted gardens on its rooftop, the results were immediate. Said John Ebers, Metro's sustainable business officer, "It [gives] patients a view, something else to look at and put their minds at ease" (*Grand Rapids Press*, June, 2007). Nature is a component of the healing process. This is what the residents of Shalom Manor and Shalom Gardens can look forward to enjoying; an offering of splendour and colour even in the heart of a cold Canadian winter.

Shalom Manor has always aimed to provide a unique and personal approach to long-term care. Since opening its doors September 15, 1979, Shalom Manor has expanded, renovated, and re-developed in order to continually raise the entire facility to modern standards. Shalom Manor has also continually expanded its vision to include not only those requiring long-term care but also those simply seeking a comfortable retirement community. In 2002 "*Evergreen Terrace*" was completed and in 2006 "*Shalom Gardens Apartments*" opened to offer an independent assisted living facility to those who desire an exceptional quality of life in a community setting based on a clear set of moral and Christian principles. The Rooftop Greening Project is another way in which Shalom Manor and Shalom Gardens is using forward thinking to raise the level of comfort and beauty yet again for its residents and their visitors while also contributing positively to environmental and financial concerns.

A quote from Joanne van Dijk, Secretary of the Building and Property Committee is telling of the positive attitude and drive of those who work for Shalom Manor and Shalom Gardens to persistently improve, in whichever way they can, the quality of life at this Christian facility. She says, "We continue to thank the Lord for his faithfulness during the construction years and pray for his blessing on all those who live in Shalom Manor and Shalom Gardens and all those who work so tirelessly to make this the best home in the province." Those who reside at the best home of its kind in the province will soon enjoy a gloriously lush and colourful rooftop which also promises to be the best of its kind.

Jeremy Buesink is a student in communications at McMaster.

Gender, community and restorative justice

Yolisa de Jager

A move to restorative justice

A surface analysis of Correctional Services Canada indicates an over-representation of Aboriginal men and women in the Canadian prison system (Finn, 1996). Though First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples make up 2.7 per cent of the total Canadian population, Aboriginal men represent 14 per cent of the total male inmate population, and Aboriginal women, 20 per cent (Finn, 1996). In order to combat this problem, there has been a move to use community-based restorative justice alternatives. It is a popular idea, which has taken root in many Christian groups as well. One key application of restorative justice in Canada is sentencing circles.

Restorative justice theory that underlies sentencing circle practices can be succinctly defined as "a process whereby all the parties with a particular stake in the offence come together to resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future" (Marshall, 2001). This group, made up of family and community members, reviews the crime and proposes a sentence. The judge mediating the circle will take these considerations and deliver an official sentence to the offender. In most cases, instead of going to jail, the offender will stay in the community and undergo various assigned activities, such as counselling, addictions treatment and community service work.

Gender and community

Community is a hallmark of sentencing circle practices. Along with participating in the circles, the community also takes part in the offenders' and victims' 'healing journeys' by attending feasts, wilderness therapy, sweat lodges, and teaching lodges. Community members are also relied upon to hold offenders accountable to their promises of transformation.

At first glance, this seems like a workable system. 'Community' is a positive and romanticized idea: people coming together to help each other. Yet, when viewed through gender lenses, 'community' is deconstructed, and in the process, loses its shine. Gender analysis involves taking into account the differentiated impact and effects of policies, events, etc., on men and on women. It also means breaking down vague concepts like 'community' into its components: men, women, girl-children, and boy-children. Feminist analysis involves looking at the degree of power and control women have in comparison to their male counterparts. Both offer key insights into what 'community' translates into in reality, especially the reality of female victims of male violence. I will focus critiques of community in relation to domestic and sexual violence against women.

It is important to see who represents 'community' since all members cannot participate equally. Community leaders, such as religious leaders or local politicians, tend to be male. Validity of women's opinions is often linked to her connection to others. They are usually seen first as mothers, daughters or wives, instead of an individual entity (Puechguirbal, 2004). This limits women's contributions and control in restorative justice processes.

Advocates of restorative justice often do not recognize community as a root of this gender-based violence. Society *prefers* to see domestic violence as "mindless, incomprehensible, unpredictable, and unpatterned behaviour enacted by the alcoholic, the mentally unstable, or the socially desperate" (Dobash, Dobash, 1998). Yet, research demonstrates domestic violence as "functional, intentional and patterned" (Dobash, Dobash, 1998). It is not a deviation from a norm, but rather, this abuse of power against women is a pervasive norm in communities. There is silent acceptance and empathy for male abusers of women, often justified by harmful gender stereotypes. Restorative justice advocate John Braithwaite admits many people "are sympathetic to the 'hapless man who must defend against a nagging, shrewish woman' or the cuckhold husband who must defend his honour" (Braithwaite, 2002). Furthermore, "batters' networks are important supporters of battering behaviour" (Braitwaite, 2002). The motive to stop and prosecute an abuser weakens when others in the community fear the same treatment for their own behaviour.

Finally, restorative justice in theory is counter-productive for female victims of domestic and sexual abuse. By privileging 'community' and 'family,' they privilege the two "primary supports for male control of women" (Coker, 2002). This is evident when looking at the fine print of sentencing circle programs; victims' participation is absolutely voluntary and not crucial to the process. The relationship between the male offender and the community apparently is more important then that of the offender and victim or the victim and community. There are often minimal programs offered to female victims compared to those for male offenders, though both the offender's and victim's reintegration back into the community are varied and complex. What is more, the frequency and severity of male abuse against his partner, even to the point of death, are heightened once the couple is separated. Women's safety is statistically in jeopardy when male abusers are permitted to stay in the community.

Can women benefit?

The importance of gender remains a major oversight in restorative justice theory and sentencing circle practice in Canada. When 'community' consists of 'old boys clubs' who hold power and control over these procedures, then sentencing circles will fail female victims of abuse. When complexities of domestic abuse and sexual abuse are not understood, or where harmful gender stereotypes prevail, women's safety will be compromised. Sentencing circles should not be viewed as a golden solution to problems of racism and over-representation within the regular justice system; out-sourcing rehabilitation of male abusers to communities is not the answer. Sentencing circles are just one of a few less than ideal options presented to female victims of abuse. As long as 'community' remains a romanticized and unchecked concept in the operation of sentencing circles, women will continue to receive a discriminatory form of justice.

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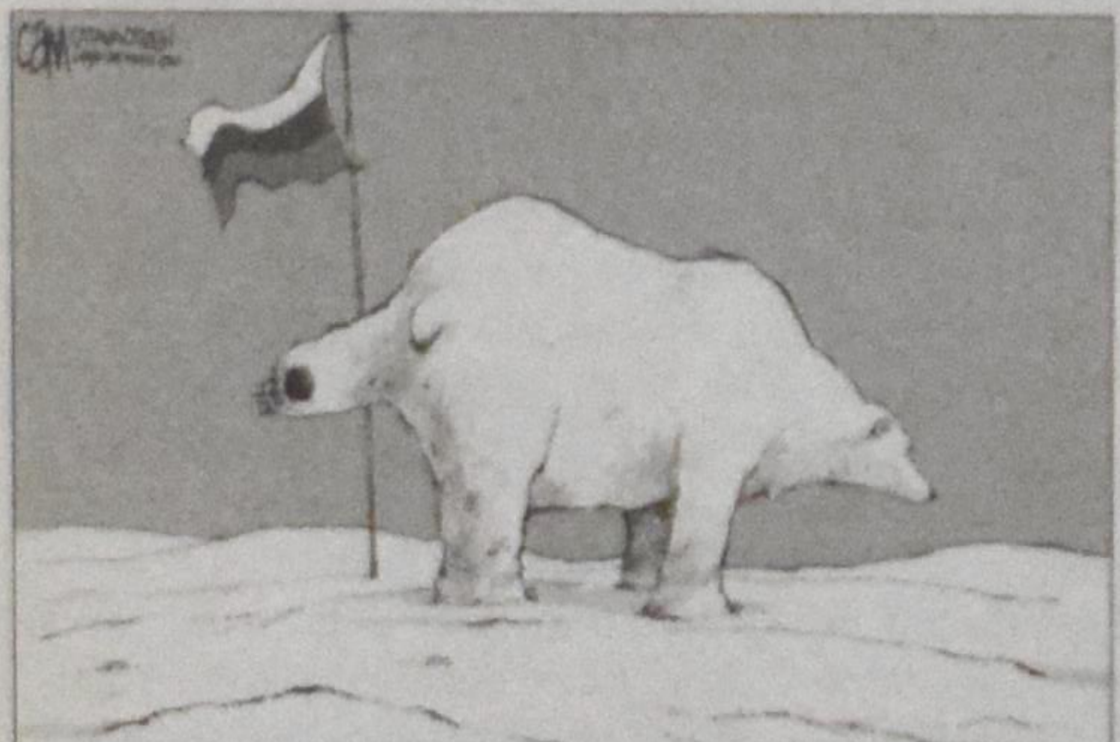

NO DOUBT RUSSIA'S TERRITORIAL CLAIM ON THE NORTH POLE WILL BE CHALLENGED

Flags *continued from p.1*

supports signing the Law of the Sea Convention but the U.S. Congress has not taken any action.

The Harper government had already taken action to beef up Canada's presence in the north, but the Russian claims quickly spurred it to greater commitments. A new training center will be established at Nunavut, 600 km from the North Pole, to condition Canadian soldiers for fighting in the north. The Canadian Rangers, a rifle toting all-volunteer Inuit patrol will be increased by 900 members. According to the *Globe and Mail* this will cost $12 million per year. (I have visions of a few hundred Canadian troops and Inuits scrambling over ice floes in pursuit of foreign submarines and icebreakers. Brrr!)

A deep sea port is to be constructed on the northern end of Baffin Island, construction to begin in 2010 and to cost $100 million. Maintaining it may cost vastly more than that. Canada will build three heavy ice breakers capable of cutting through seven meters of ice (that's the claim), and underwater surveillance posts will be installed so at least we will know if our neighbors have come calling and our claims of sovereignty are being ignored.

In the meantime, we will have to depend on our Rangers armed with nice new high-powered rifles to "Stand on guard for thee" in the frigid reaches of the north to repel the Russkies and the Yanks. It also helps that no insurance company will touch any shipping company crazy enough to attempt the Northwest Passage and it will likely remain that way for many years to come.

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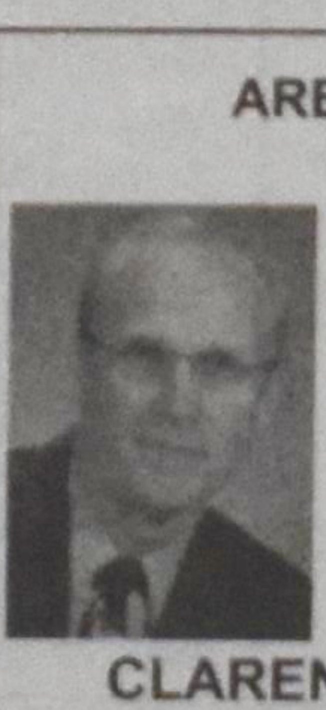

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Editorial

Psalm 91: a psalm that tells us the way it isn't

Harry der Nederlanden

Psalm 91 is perhaps the most outrageously optimistic Psalm in the Bible. In the past it was often paired with Psalm 90. Psalm 90 was read on Old Year's and Psalm 91 on New Year's to launch us into the year ahead imbued with confidence in God's care.

It's an exuberant poem expressing confidence in God's protection no matter what. It promises the believer safety from the fowler's snare, from deadly plagues and pestilence, even from arrows on the battlefield. In fact, says the poet, thousands may be dropping dead all around you, whether from plague or arrows, but you'll emerge unscathed. Worried that you may stumble or stub your toe? No need. Angels will guard your foot. You can even step on lions and "the serpent" – and you'll trample them.

But the plague of cancer did not pass me by and it did not pass by several other members of our congregation. Our church is in the middle of a series on the Psalms, and several times members of the congregation have been asked to say how the Psalm in question speaks to them.

This past Sunday was my turn. I suppose the reasoning was, "Let's get somebody who has been smacked by cancer twice and see what he says. Can he speak these extravagantly upbeat words? Or will they stick in his throat?"

I wasn't entirely comfortable representing "The Suffering": aside from the cancer my life has been richly blessed.

But I recall reading this Psalm when Rose and I were caring for my aging parents who lived with us. My mom was not only suffering from the beginnings of Alzheimer's, but her knee joints were shot so she could walk only with great difficulty, she had bouts of shingles that were very painful, she had periodic attacks of angina, and every so often her esophagus would start bleeding. On top of all that, her husband, my father, would often not recognize her.

Once he pointed at her as she was making the bed, and asked me, "Who's that woman over there?"

"That's mom – your wife."

"You mean I'm married to her?"

"That's right."

He squinted and looked her over carefully. "No, I don't believe it: I wouldn't marry anyone that ugly."

"Have you looked in a mirror lately?" I asked, picking up a shaving mirror.

It's a funny story, but it was also sad. 'Lord,' I'd sometimes say, 'they've been your faithful servants for over eight decades through some very rough times, couldn't you do a little better by them in their old age?' In the light of what we really see in life – pain, violence, disease, deterioration, broken relationships, hunger and death – in equal measure in the lives of believers – doesn't this Psalm ring false?

It seems to contradict what we see and know. It glosses over all the evils to celebrate a teflon faith and a teflon believer. When a bridge collapses, will Christ believers remain suspended in mid air? Should a Christian soldier refuse to wear a kevlar vest?

So, it's no wonder that we ask, "What does someone who's in the pits do with a Psalm like this?" How on earth can it speak to him? How can this be God's word for him? It is shameless hyperbole; it goes over the top and then does it again and again. Isn't the confidence it conveys false bravado?

Suppose you're lying there moaning on your bed, attached to tubes and crying for more pain killers, and one of those always-be-happy-Christians sits down beside you and reads this Psalm. Wouldn't it be hard to stomach? You'd probably like to read back one of the imprecatory Psalms denouncing the stupid insensitivity of people.

Preachers often praise the Psalms for the variety of moods, attitudes and voices. One can always find one, they say, that gives expression to what lives in your heart.

But look at the extravagant, impossible promises this Psalm put in our mouths. You really don't need a guy twice-bitten by cancer to be boggled by its claims, do you? No matter how healthy, wealthy, cool, carefree and in love you are, surely your tongue should trip over these words. They don't accord with *anyone's* inner voice or personal experience; they contradict what we see and read every day; they blatantly clash with our knowledge of life in this world. Who is this writer – a gullible fool? Is he high on something?

We all know this is not how things go in life, not even in the life of a believer – and we can quote Job and many other Psalms to support that.

But the Psalms aren't there to confirm what we already know. Many times the word of God seems to contradict all that we know – or think we know – and it stretches us to see much, much more. We become so encapsulated in our own private, local stories, unable to see beyond the misery and the pain within and without, that we lose sight of what God is doing in us, through us and beyond us.

The writer of this Psalm isn't blind to the violence and sufferings of this world. He conjures them up and then says, "But don't worry – they can't touch *you*." Or perhaps better: "They can *touch* you."

As we read this Psalm, we're quite aware that it goes way over the top; in fact, we feel uplifted, elevated. It is a launching pad. Our hearts beat faster and visions and hopes begin to boil up on the horizon like the mist clouds over Niagara Falls.

We don't see this world truly if all that we see is what is before our eyes – brokenness, violence, suffering, disease and death triumphant. We must see God the Redeemer leading his people to victory over death. Psalm 91, I believe, stretches us to see what's coming from beyond the end of time. It invokes the same sort of wonder as Isaiah with his vision of the lion lying down with the lamb, as Joel's vision of sons and daughters prophesying and old men dreaming dreams, as Micah's of swords being hammered into plowshares, and St. John's of the New Jerusalem descending to earth as Christ's radiant bride.

Psalm 91 is eschatological. It gives us a foretaste of what is coming when Christ returns to rule in Glory, when the whole earth will be renewed and we will be new creatures in a new creation, sons and daughters of the most High. Then we will be safe, but that "then" doesn't preclude "now".

When he is in the desert being tempted by Satan, Jesus cites this Psalm – the verses that speak of guardian angels who will see to it that he won't even stub his toe. But does that remove the mystery of this Psalm? For Christ was not protected against all the things mankind and the devil launched against him. He took upon himself our infirmities and sorrows; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter. He was the opposite of Teflon Man. Yet, knowing what is to come, he cited this Psalm. It's a mystery, isn't it – that the One who would one day cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" can also cite this outrageously optimistic Psalm that says, "You're safe; nothing can touch you."

But the Bible insists on saying extravagant things. It says to those confronted by death, death can't touch you because you already have eternal life. You're already a citizen of the world to come. That seems contrary to fact. I know I will have to die. But in Christ, we have already died to the worst terrors of death, the terror that death is the final answer and will swallow up everything meaningful and beautiful in darkness. He died, won the victory over death and rose again to show us that there's a new world a-coming and we're already part of it.

We celebrate these absurd and extravagant visions every time we gather around the Lord's table, for then too we are saying the future is coming, but it's already here. In faith, in Christ, we know our lives are safe with God.

As Paul says in Romans 8:

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." (28-30)

And he goes on: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (38-39)

I appreciate the Psalms of lament, for they give us permission to wail out all our troubles to the Lord. But when I wake up in the middle of the night and the pain pills are no longer working, and I begin to fret about all the outrageous delays in my treatment, I don't need the Psalmist's words. I have plenty of my own.

What I need most is the outrageous vision of Psalm 91, for it lifts me out of the darkness with words that come not from within myself but from God himself.

Note: after almost three-and-a-half months I have at last been plugged in and have begun receiving chemotherapy. I'm grateful – and also thankful for your prayers and cards. Harry

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Opinion

When faith and sound government policy can agree… act boldly!

Gerald Vandezande

Prior to the 2006 federal election, *Faith Today*, the magazine of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, published the response of Prime Minister Stephen Harper to a question it had put to him: "What role do you think faith should play in developing public policy, and what is the place of religious institutions in contemporary Canadian society?"

Mr. Harper's published reply read, in part, as follows: *"Canada is a multicultural and pluralistic society, but this does not mean that faith has to be excluded from public life. Rather, it means that those of different faiths and no faith should seek areas of common agreement based on their different perspectives…religious institutions –churches, synagogues, temples and mosques, as well as para church organizations like faith-based charities – play a vital role in Canadian society. Churches and religious charities are active in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming strangers and visiting prisoners. Church and faith-based schools educate hundreds of thousands of Canadian children. And charities like World Vision, Samaritan's Purse, or the Mennonite Central Committee help Canadians share with the developing world. A Conservative government would recognize the vital work done by religious institutions and ensure that religious charities are eligible to participate in government programs on the same basis as other charities and non-governmental organizations."*

It is indeed an important principle that "*those of different faiths and no faith should seek areas of common agreement based on their different perspectives.*"

Since the 2006 federal election, there has been a great deal of conferring, strategizing and goal-selection among activist citizens with a passion for social justice, rooted either in religious faith or in a compassionate secular framework. They have uncovered some very strong "areas of common agreement", and they intend to give those shared convictions strong political legs in the next federal election, whenever it occurs.

One declaration that gives voice to this growing consensus is *The Ottawa Manifesto Regarding Homelessness in Canada.* First published in *The Ottawa Citizen* as a full-page ad on April 3, 2007, the Manifesto resoundingly names an agreement reached by several hundred front-line workers from across Canada who gathered at the invitation of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada for a National Roundtable on Poverty and Homelessness at Street Level.

In Canada, homelessness is the most drastic and disabling symptom of a level of poverty that simply should not be tolerated in a county that has Canada's resources, skills and ethical traditions. In the words of the Manifesto, here is one unshakeable "common agreement" that confronts governments, citizens and religious believers simultaneously: "*Justice and mercy define good government…. Homelessness must be a priority for policy-makers across Canada concerned with justice and mercy.*"

Citizens and politicians alike clearly owe it to Canada's collective conscience to initiate and implement quality affordable housing projects wherever needed and possible, whether in big cities, small communities, or on reserves where some Aboriginal Canadians suffer from lethally substandard housing.

With support from the millions of citizens who understand this imperative, generous and stewardly government programs can substantially alleviate and, sooner rather than later, can effectively eliminate homelessness and the disabling poverty that is its root cause.

If Mr. Harper truly plans to take seriously the "areas of common agreement" that he urges citizens of differing faiths to seek and to find, the decision not to tolerate homelessness in Canada is as commonly shared and as rock-bottom a shared conviction as anyone could name.

Strong forward motion on the crisis of homelessness, and of the non-affordability of decent housing for many who are not currently out on the street, is politically and economically possible. But it will take decisive, creative, life-changing, priority-shifting political action. For example: why couldn't Parliament allocate 50 per cent of the annual budget surplus to fight homelessness and other disabling aspects of poverty in Canada?

Clearly, the social health and human well-being of poor and powerless neighbours is worthy of visionary political leadership that is motivated by living faith and by the consistent practice of national core values, such as mutual respect and mutual responsibility, in the non-partisan service of the common good.

If Mr. Harper and his associates will use their considerable power in Parliament to demonstrate creative leadership in the struggle for affordable homes for all, their initiative will deserve the honest support of members of other parties and other levels of government – and Canadians will expect and reward such non-partisan support. Furthermore, the skills and passions of thousands of front-line community workers in various action networks across Canada stand ready to turn good new policies into concrete, creative local achievements.

Different faiths in common agreement, leading to communally supported action? A great vision indeed: a great hope for any society. To discover how close at hand is such a possibility, even in this diverse country, let Canada's senior government unite its too often fragmented talents in a great project aimed at secure, fully adequate housing for all. The response, from many citizens of many faiths, will be a resounding one.

Gerald Vandezande, C.M.
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Gerald Vandezande is the retired National Public Affairs Director of Citizens for Public Justice and a Volunteer Spokesperson of the Campaign Against Child Poverty.

How Christian is your view of work?

Bert den Boggende

Compare Genesis 2 with Genesis 3 and you'll find two basic ingredients of the ways Christians have viewed labour. In Genesis 2 work is viewed positively, with Adam and Eve expected to cultivate and take care of the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3, after the fall, work receives a negative connotation: the soil is accursed and labour will be tough (see also Gen. 5:29). Which one of these two poles do we emphasize?

The ecumenical as well as the Reformed confessions are silent about work. The contemporary testimony *Our World Belongs to God* (section 51) makes some important contributions based on a few New Testament texts: "In our work, even in dull routine, we hear the call to serve our Lord. We must work for more than wages, and manage for more than profit, so that mutual respect and the just use of goods and skills may shape the workplace, and so that, while we earn or profit, useful products and services may result." The dull routine conveys here the negative side, while the notion of serving God in our work emphasizes the positive. However, more can be said about our work and in order to do so I would like to survey briefly the period of the early church to the Reformation.

The apostle Paul could be regarded as representative of the very beginning of the church. In the Greco-Roman world of his time manual labour was deemed the activity of slaves and lower classes, while the intelligentsia held such work below their dignity. Paul instead encourages the new Christians to be industrious, regardless of their station. In fact, he counsels slaves to serve their masters well, although in the story of Onesimus and Philemon he shows a new relationship and sows the seed that would contribute to the abolition of slavery. He tells people living in idleness to start working and earning the food that they eat (2 Thess. 3:11; cf. 1 Tim. 5:13). Significantly, he himself, one of the great minds of his time, did not disdain manual work, earning his keep as a tent maker. But as the parable of the rich man hoarding his possessions, Luke 12:16-21, makes clear, there are limits to the value of daily work.

A few centuries after Paul some important changes had taken place. The clergy had begun to acquire special status, while the rest of the people were reduced to laity. The clergy came to be regarded as holier than the laity, resulting in a situation not really different from that of the pagan Greco-Roman world. Church work was seen as superior to other work; the one was work for God, the other for mankind. A side effect of this hierarchical understanding of work was that the Sunday was severed from the rest of the week. During the Middle Ages the Catholic Church reinforced this situation. Work, manual labour, was again associated with the curse of Genesis 3. Monasticism became the idea, although we need to be careful here. Benedictine monks were expected not only to meditate but also to work on the land. Put differently, work and prayer should go together. Unfortunately, that was not always the case.

One of Luther's great contributions was in the field of labour. He broke with the negative view of labour of the medieval church and returned to a Pauline view. Everyone had a calling from God, not just the clergy. Our calling (vocation) entailed, or at least should entail, the task for the good of the whole community (Acts 2:39); it broadened the call which Moses received (Ex. 3) to all Christians. Thus the community of all the called formed together the *ekklesia*, the church. They were all called to do God's will and be holy (no division between lay and clergy!), and, as Eph. 4 indicated, every Christian had the vocation to serve

See **Work** *on p. 7*

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Review

Five years of war through the eyes of a young boy

Sid Baron, *The Way It Was: Growing up in Wartime Holland.* Bellingham, Washington: Exxel Publishing. 2006, 168 pages.

Reviewed by Bert Witvoet, former editor of *Christian Courier*.

The subtitle indicates what this biographical account by author Baron is about: Holland under German occupation seen through the eyes of a teenager, although the first 50 pages recall events of Sid Baron's childhood before the war broke out. There is even a concluding chapter dealing with post-war preparations for emigration to America. Nevertheless, the greatest impact on the reader is made by the telling of the stirring events that surrounded the horrendous time of Nazi conquest and defeat.

Sid Baron is not a writer by profession, unlike his brother Henry Baron, who is a retired professor of English and writer. Sid was and is a successful businessman who in his retirement still manages a construction and development company in the state of Washington. But the ability to tell a good yarn is apparently not lost in his DNA. *The Way It Was* is a fascinating account of five years of war and death experienced by a young boy growing up in the northern part of Holland.

Dramatic events

For a young boy (he was almost 10 when the German army invaded his country) he experienced an extra-ordinary number of fearful events – he witnessed air battles overhead, saw German soldiers round up local men, was keenly aware of the danger his family was in when they hid a resistance man and his family, a danger significantly increased by a snooping neighbour who collaborated with the enemy. The result of Baron's recollections is an action-packed story that keeps the reader anticipating and dreading the outcome of certain events.

The most amazing account in the book is perhaps Sid's recollection of the time he witnessed a B-17 bomber jettison its bombs just before being blown out of the sky by a German fighter plane. Sid saw that one of the occupants of the B-17 bomber had escaped the doomed plane by parachuting down to earth. That person was later identified as 23-year-old turret gunner Howard Adams. Many years later, Baron was able to obtain Adam's extensive account of this last flight of the bomber known as *Sky Queen*, and of his capture by the Germans, and his two years spent in a war camp in Germany. Talk about providing the reader with an almost omniscient author's account.

A time for love

The story is not without moments of grace. Sid's family was a close-knit family that lived out their faith commitments and breathed trust in God and love for each other. One incident illustrates the sensitive and caring ways of this family. Sid's younger brother, Henry, accidentally sliced Sid's forehead with a peeling knife. Blood streamed down Sid's face. But instead of blaming his brother, Sid admitted to his mother that he had started the horseplay. The family agreed not to tell others about the incident lest his younger brother become the brunt of ridicule and teasing. "He [meaning, Henry] may be suffering more that you right now," Sid's mother said to him, while pinching the wound shut with her fingers.

Another incident illustrates amply that this family took God's love commandment seriously. Sid's father was upset that his brother Hans no longer bought dairy feed supplies from him, at a time when his business was needed to provide his own family with food on the table. He wrote an angry letter to his brother, pulling in the authority of Scripture to justify his anger. His brother replied by saying that he, too, needed to supply his family with food and that Sid's father had been selfish in his accusations. Sid's father reflected on the exchange for a while, and then decided immediately to bike to where his brother lived and apologize to him. He came back humming the tune, "How good and pleasant is the sight, when brothers make it their delight to dwell in sweet accord." [No doubt, the Dutch version of the Genevan Psalm 133 was hummed: *"Waar liefde woont gebied de Heer zijn zegen."*)

A time for fun

Small-town humour also keeps popping up. Apparently Sid and his family enjoyed playing pranks on others. None succeeded better than the time Sid and his buddies exchanged a drunken man's chew of tobacco with a wad of horse turd. The enraged man's reaction after he had chewed on the offensive substance, provided Sid and his friends and family with days of entertainment.

At this point, it might be appropriate to point out a certain prudishness exhibited by the author. He himself referred to the chew as a "wad of oats that had gone through a horse." He leaves it to the drunkard to identify the object as "a wad of *hynster stront* (horse shit)." In itself my observation is perhaps a negligible comment, but this reviewer noted that earlier in the story Baron referred to the teats of a cow as "handles" and the teats of a sow as "buttons." Perhaps this tendency towards euphemisms indicates a change in the author's vocabulary from the time he was a grounded Frisian farm boy to the time he became a respected member of the Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Washington.

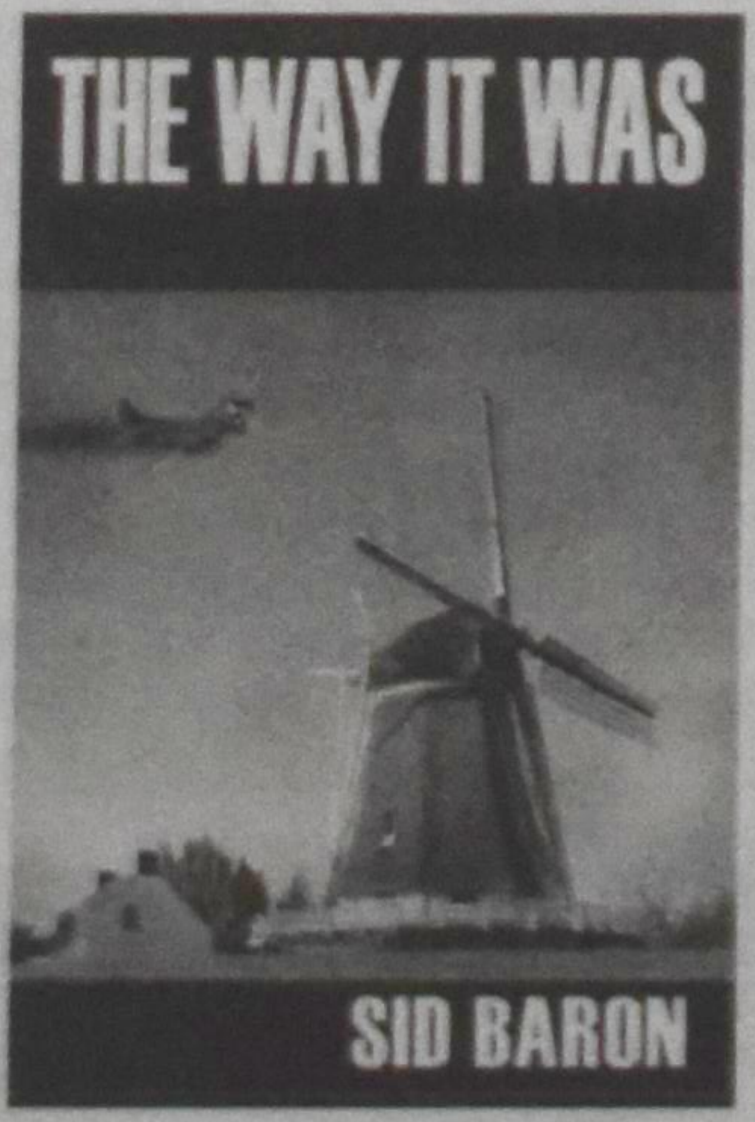
The larger context

Baron has done more than recall personal experiences. His later research on the Second World War, especially as it involved his native land, brings a convincing context to his account. This reviewer also lived through the war years in occupied Holland, but he did not know, for example, that the Dutch airforce acquitted itself very well in the early days of the war. Baron tells us that "Dutch airmen destroyed one third of the entire German air fleet engaged in the air war over Holland – 328 of about 1000 Luftwaffe airplanes" – an achievement never to be matched by any other allied force. Also, by the end of the five-day war, close to 3,000 Dutch soldiers had been killed, and close to twice that number German soldiers. So much for the notion that Holland never put up much of a fight, as I had been led to believe.

The Way It Was provides today's descendants of survivors of the German occupation of Holland with an accurate and graphic illustration of what it was like to have your country being taken over by a foreign army, by a Fascist dictator who knew no mercy. These five years changed the life of Sid Baron as it did the lives of many others. It was a time when a person's mettle was severely tested. Baron remembers his parents with admiration: "They demonstrated through example that the first and greatest commandment — to love God and love your fellow man — were principles that they would never compromise, even in the face of death."

This story helps us all to remember with gratitude the sacrifices made by so many for the freedom and honor of one's country.

REMEMBERING WORLD WAR II



On May 10, 1940 Hitler's war machine blitzkrieged their way through the peaceful country of the Netherlands. Gain new insight in what it was like when the routine of life is forever changed.

Discover what it was like to know you were about to die in a hail of bullets and never grow up?

Childhood years should be carefree and innocent. As Sid Baron relates in colorful, vivid detail, there is no shield to protect the young in time of war. Yet, courage, faith and laughter flow through the writer's experience and become one.

Readers, both young and old, find themselves sitting at the edge of their seats in suspense. Another page has them nearly falling off the seat with laughter. "The Way it Was" is a real page turner and unforgettable.

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Stewardship

Work *continued from p.5*

God and others in their daily lives. For Luther, 1 Cor. 7:20-24 was especially important: "Let each of you remain in the condition [*klesis*] in which you are called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it.... In whatever condition you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God." Notice here that Luther did not encourage social climbing, although in his own life he moved from a miner's son to professor in theology. Even so, he could write that "when a maid milks the cows or a hired hand hoes the field…they serve God more than all the monks and nuns" and "if you do your daily household chores, that is better than the holiness and austere life of all the monks." Or again, "If you are a manual laborer, you find that the Bible has been put into your workshop, into your hand, into your heart. It teaches and preaches how you should treat your neighbor. Just look at your tools – at your needle or thimble, your beer barrel, your goods, your scales or yardstick or measure – and you will read the statement inscribed on them." For Luther, ordinary work was holy because it was anchored in faith in Christ; daily occupations were avenues to express God's glory and serve the needs of God's people. The content of the work, he argued, was not so important as the spirit in which it was done.

While Luther declared that God called Christians to serve him *in* their occupations, Calvinists declared that God also called them *to* their occupations. The difference seems slight, but it implied a social climbing. Furthermore, in the Calvinist-Puritan tradition there appeared an emphasis on duty and hard work as God-pleasing virtues in and of themselves. Industrious workers could expect God's blessing. Gradually prosperity came to be seen as a mark of God's favour. This development had two consequences. In its secularized form it would lead to the Protestant work ethic that stimulated capitalism (see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*) and it created anew a hierarchy of callings. Rather than serving each other through one's calling, work served the individual, or as Robert Bellah et al in their significant book *Habits of the Heart* put it, "through work one gains self-respect and the ability to control, at least in part, one's environment." As far as the new hierarchy of callings is concerned, we haven't moved away all that far from the Catholic understanding, especially not when the Lord's work is equated with church related activities rather than with work to make living.

Allow me to indulge in an example

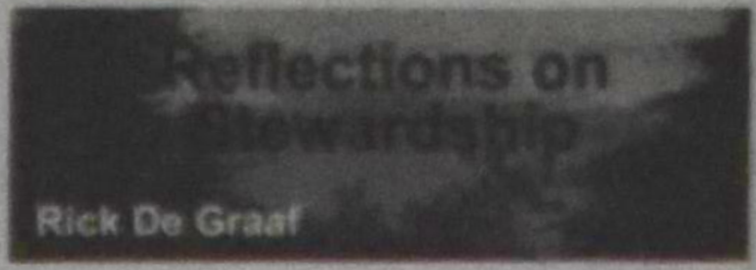
Luther

of how easy it is to think hierarchically. Many years ago I had a quite intelligent and witty student in my class. Unfortunately, he was not interested in academic work. He wanted to become a big truck driver. As far as I was concerned, he was wasting his talents. I finally suggested that, if he wanted to become a truck driver, he should become the best one possible. There was nothing wrong in urging him to do better academically, but in my mind truck driving stood on a lower level than work of the mind. More vaguely I thought that truck driving had fewer opportunities for proclaiming Christ. At that time I did not think I thought hierarchically; but how wrong my thinking was. I'm sure you can think of other examples. How easy it is to look down on someone who is unemployed or whose status is lower than your own.

Partly our acknowledged or unacknowledged hierarchical thinking comes from that Calvinist-Puritan notion that God prospers the hard working person. It seems to me that this notion confusingly equates "God blesses" with "God prospers." God's blessings may or may not result in material ways. Here Calvinists may learn something from Luther. Admittedly, Luther has been criticized for suggesting to stay in one's vocation, a suggestion that could encourage quietism toward social injustice. However, he also saw that work could be frustrating and entail failure, which in a sense was beneficial, for such failure would be a means to drive a person to the cross, back to Jesus. In other words, work would not only be a form of fulfilling the cultural mandate and a service to neighbours but also a reminder of our imperfection and thus our need to turn to the source of perfection. This Lutheran insight could contribute to a more holistic, biblical view of work.

For Luther's views, see D. Michael Bennethum's booklet, *Listen! God is Calling! Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003)

A question of ownership



For this issue, I thought I would share an article, in its entirety, written by friend and former colleague, Greta Luimes for the newsletter of the Canadian National Christian Foundation [www.cncf.ca]. I have their permission to reprint it.

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."
Matthew10:39

Otto Koning was a missionary in New Guinea. He worked among a native tribe that had known only their village ways. One of those village ways was stealing from others. When Otto and his wife arrived and moved into a hut, the natives often came by to visit. The Konings would notice that after the natives left the missionaries' home, various household items had disappeared. They saw these items again when they went to preach in the natives' village. The only fruit Otto could grow on the island was pineapples. Otto loved pineapples, and he took pride in the pineapples he was able to grow. However, whenever the pineapples began to ripen, the natives would steal them. Otto could never keep a ripe pineapple for himself. This was a frustration, and he became angry with the natives. All during the seven-year period in which this took place, Otto preached the gospel to these natives, but never had a conversion. The more the natives stole, the more angry Otto became. Finally, one day Otto had a German Shepherd dog flown in from another missionary to protect his pineapple garden after other frustrated efforts failed. This only further alienated the natives from him.

Otto took a furlough to the United States and attended a conference on personal rights. At this conference, he discovered that he was frustrated over this situation because he had taken personal ownership of his pineapple garden. After much soul searching, he gave his garden to God. Soon the natives started having problems among their tribe. They discovered that Otto was the reason for their problems because he gave his garden to his God. The natives saw a correlation between what Otto had done and their own lives being affected by calamities in their village. When Otto gave his garden to God, he no longer got angry and was free from worry. The natives started bringing him fruit from the garden because they didn't want any more calamities to come into their village.

The light came on one day when a native said to Otto, "You must have become a Christian, Otto. You don't get angry anymore. We always wondered if we would ever meet a Christian." They had never associated Otto with the kind of person he was preaching about because his message did not line up with his life. Otto was broken in spirit when he realized he had been such a failure.

At the end of seven years, he witnessed his first conversion, and many began coming to Christ once he fully gave his garden to God. The fruit grew so abundant that Otto began exporting it and growing other types of fruit, such as bananas. His village became the most evangelized in the whole region, yet for seven years he had not had even one convert. Otto realized something each of us must realize: *To gain your life you must lose it, along with your possessions.* It was only when he gave all his possessions to God that he became free from them. God measured back to him manyfold once God had complete ownership.

Do you have some possessions that you need to give up to God today? Let God have all that you have. *Become a steward, not an owner*. You will be surprised at how well God can take care of his possessions.

Stewardly tip: Hot water. During part of my recent assignment to Kenya for CRWRC, I stayed at the home of a CRWRC missionary who was on 'home service'. Cost of electricity is even more expensive there than here so there is a much greater incentive to save energy. One way they did so was by using a programmable hot water heater set to provide hot water at only certain times during the day: an hour before the morning showers or the evening dishes or the time set for the laundry. Essentially their water heater was on for only 3-4 hours each day. In Europe, on demand hot water heaters (electric and gas) are quite commonplace. Maybe it's time to install them here!

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestions (by mail to *Christian Courier* or by email to my address below) and provide your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask you for more details.

Next issue: Time to Give

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca

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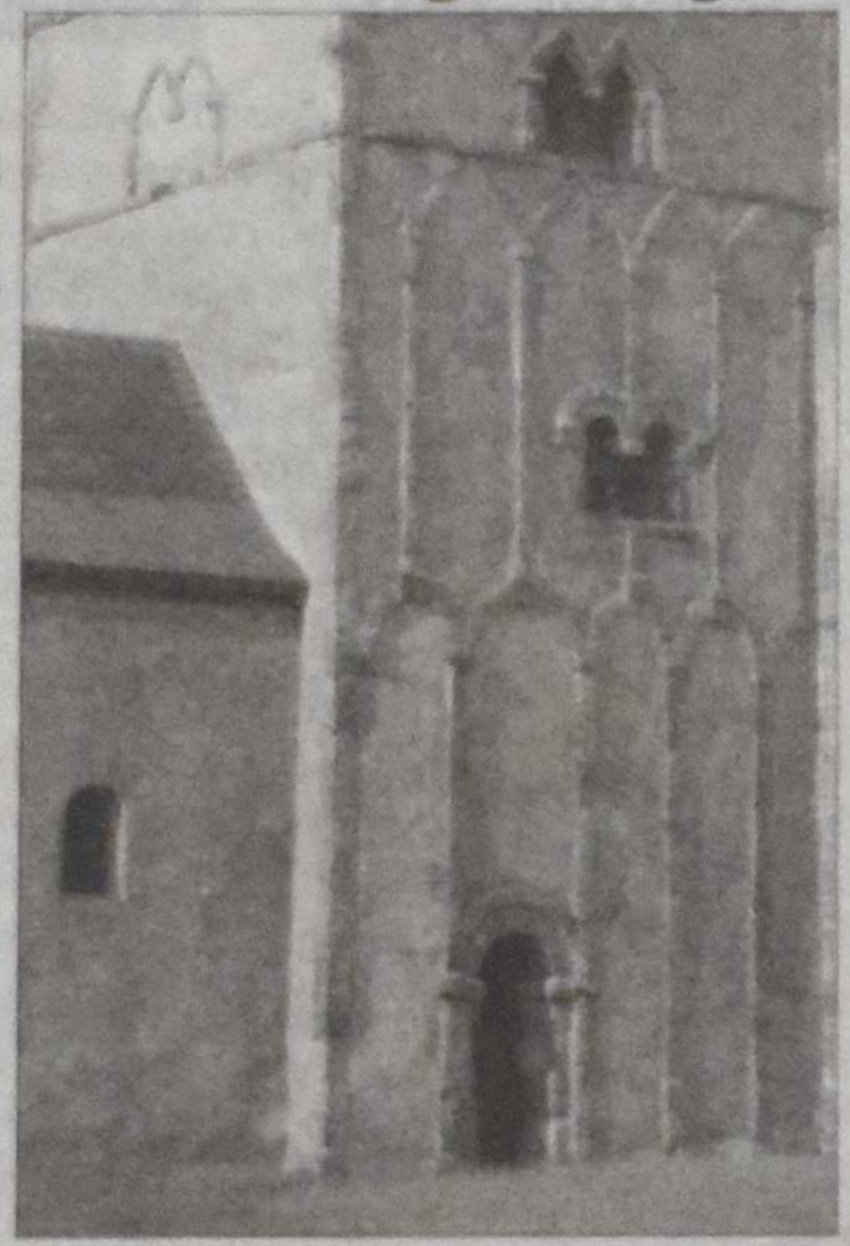
Church

New role for old bones at English Anglo-Saxon church

By Martin Revis

London (ENI) – St Peter's, a 10th century church at Barton-upon-Humber in northeast England, has reopened after a 600,000 British pound (US$1.2 million) makeover. It is now an international centre for the study of human remains, and a visitor attraction.



When this (Anglican) Church of England building became redundant 30 years ago, the bones of some 3760 people buried there over the course of 1000 years were removed for use in medical research into the development of diseases. The bones are now being returned for storage within the church in 3500 boxes that will be kept in a purpose-built ossuary, or bone repository. This is the first ossuary of its kind in England, and its contents will be available on site to all bona fide researchers.

"Buried Lives", a separate public interactive exhibition that opened in the building on May 24 and runs till September 30, tells the story of the church with its unique Saxon tower and only extant baptistery of the period.

The exhibition centrepiece is a display of three complete skeletons. One, in its original oak coffin, is of a man who died at the time of the Norman Conquest of England in the 11th century. Another is a 13th century priest, whose calling is identified by the chalice buried beside him. The third skeleton is that of an early 19th century woman.

The thousands of bones now available for further study reveal that poor nutrition, polio and many forms of arthritis were prevalent in the area. Despite the perceived violence of the times, only six individuals showed signs of injuries caused by swords or knives.

"It is envisaged as a pilot scheme which could be adopted for other collections elsewhere, as there is a lot of scientific and academic interest," Kevin Booth, senior curator of English Heritage, which carried out the project in agreement with the Church of England, explained to Ecumenical News International.

"The church was keen that the bones be returned to a consecrated place of rest, where they will be blessed at a special service, probably on St Peter's Day, next February," said Booth. "The exhibition shows what changing burial traditions tell us about past societies, and highlights how the bones are being used by scientists to uncover secrets about disease and diet."

The names of the people exhibited as skeletons are not known, and the exhibition organizers have decided that it would be inappropriate to give them names for display purposes.

Hong Kong Christians seek true religious freedom in China

Francis Wong

Hong Kong (ENI) – A year before the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, Hong Kong Christian leaders have asked China to grant true religious freedom in the country.

"Even though Beijing tried to give the impression it would improve its human rights record, when it was applying to host the 2008 Olympic Games, there is no substantial evidence to show its human rights situation has improved," the Rev. Kwok Nai-Wang, a consultant to the Christian Conference of Asia, told Ecumenical News International.

Kwok, a Hong Kong-based theologian, noted that there is a proposal for Bibles to be available at hotels during the Olympics, but stressed that the presence of religious freedom in China exists only when the faithful do not challenge the political status quo.

Kwok said, "A genuine freedom of religions is about freedom of beliefs, and the faithful can care about the poor and social injustice."

The official Protestant church in China emphasises a concept called the "self-propagation of faith" said Kwok, the former general secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council. He asserts that foreign Christian guests should have the right to share their faith with local people, so long as the guests respect their "feelings".

Rose Wu, director of the Hong Kong Christian Institute, told ENI the policy of self-propagation does not coincide with the international understanding of religious freedom. "When we talk about religious freedom, it means that people can preach, express their beliefs and share their faith freely," she explained.

Wu said she believed that foreign evangelical Christians who want to preach at the Olympics might not achieve positive results, because she believes evangelisation is a long-term interaction of faith and life.

She is also concerned about the mass development of Beijing. "The Chinese government has spent so many resources hosting the Beijing Olympics, which is questionable if the livelihoods of local people are ignored. Don't forget a government should take care of its people first, and not promote its so-called 'international image' at all costs," said Wu.

Meanwhile, Eli Chan Ka-Wai, associate director of the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, said that the International Olympic Committee had done nothing to monitor labour rights during preparations for the Beijing Games.

"With the new leadership in China, there is tighter monitoring and control of civil society movements," the Christian labour worker said. "And when China is searching for higher industrial productivity, local labour faces much greater pressure."

Evangelicals back other Christians on conversion code of conduct

Juan Michel

Toulouse, France (ENI) – A World Evangelical Alliance theologian says his grouping of Christians that stresses its proclamation of the Gospel is ready to support a code of conduct on seeking conversions to Christianity commonly agreed by traditional Protestant, Anglican and Orthodox churches as well as by Roman Catholics.

"'Evangelical' and 'ecumenical' Christians have never been as close in this regard as they are today. Thus, something that would not have been possible 30 years ago has become achievable," said Thomas Schirrmacher, a German theologian who chairs the WEA's International Institute for Religious Freedom. "It would be the first time ever that such a broad Christian backing is given to an agreement of this kind."

Schirrmacher was a speaker at an August 8-12 consultation in Toulouse, jointly hosted by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Geneva-based World Council of Churches' program on interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Attended by some 30 Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical theologians and church representatives, the meeting advanced the mapping out of a common code of conduct on religious conversion. A finalised code is expected by 2010.

For Schirrmacher, such a code should, "establish the borderline between acceptable forms of mission protected by religious freedom, and undue forms of trying to convert people". The WEA leader recognised, however, the difficulty in nailing down "unethical means" to a concrete code of conduct, given different historical, religious, cultural and political contexts.

Some adherents of Pentecostalism, and others within Evangelical Christianity have come in for criticism by other Christians and members of other religions for engaging in aggressive proselytising. Tensions have also arisen among Christian denominations, including Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox, over what has been called "sheep stealing", or engaging in conversion by encroaching into areas where one church has traditionally dominated.

While preserving the right to propagate one's faith, the code of conduct would emphasise respect for the faithful of any religion, noted Hermen Shastri, general secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia and co-moderator of the WCC's Faith and Order Commission. "Religious preachers need to be told that no religion has monopoly to the truth, that there are many ways to find salvation," said Shastri.

Evangelising activities need to avoid, "stooping to belittle or condemn other religions," affirmed Fiorello Mascarenhas, a Jesuit from India and a former chairperson of the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office Council. Rather, he said, evangelisation should promote, "inter-religious dialogue and religious harmony, as well as wholehearted cooperation in human welfare projects".

For Tony Richie, a theologian and pastor with the Church of God in the United States, a Pentecostal denomination, the code of conduct must be built around the concept of "dialogical evangelism" instead of "aggressive evangelism". Such an evangelism, Richie believes, can still be energetic and enthusiastic but not coercive or manipulative. He also explains that an appropriate evangelism needs to be ecumenical in attitude and concerned with operating ethically.

John Langlois, a lawyer who is an executive council member of the WEA, and also attended the Toulouse meeting, talks of the code of conduct including, "an expression of repentance for past wrongdoings so as to make clear that the superiority mentality in regard to other religions has been overcome".

While expressing sorrow because Evangelicals have used "undue pressure" or "violated human rights in the name of missions", Schirrmacher stressed that "all branches of Christianity need to be self-critical". The envisioned code of conduct, "will only make sense if it is not directed against Evangelicals and Pentecostals but written together with them". The WEA's "involvement and blessing is crucial in order to win the 'black sheep' amongst Evangelicals and Pentecostals over for a respectful kind of evangelism," Schirrmacher said.

For Hans Ucko, a Swedish theologian who leads the WCC's program for interreligious dialogue and cooperation, "The fact that Protestants, Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals and Evangelicals were able to meet and discuss such a complex issue is in itself a success." While emphasising the preliminary character of the findings, Ucko said the code of conduct would distinguish between "aggressive proselytizing" and "evangelism", and balance the mandate to evangelise and the right to choose freely.

How to enforce such a code of conduct, however, remains an open question. Neither the WEA nor the WCC has any formal authority over their members. It is also clear that the code of conduct is unlikely to become official policy within the Catholic Church. In regard to Pentecostals, there is "no one who can force all of them to do anything", Richie said. He suggested, however, that, "The power of positive peer pressure can be pretty effective".

Juan Michel is the press officer for the World Council of Churches and was assigned by ENI to write this story.

Church

Russian church commemorates Stalin's victims with huge cross

By Sophia Kishkovsky

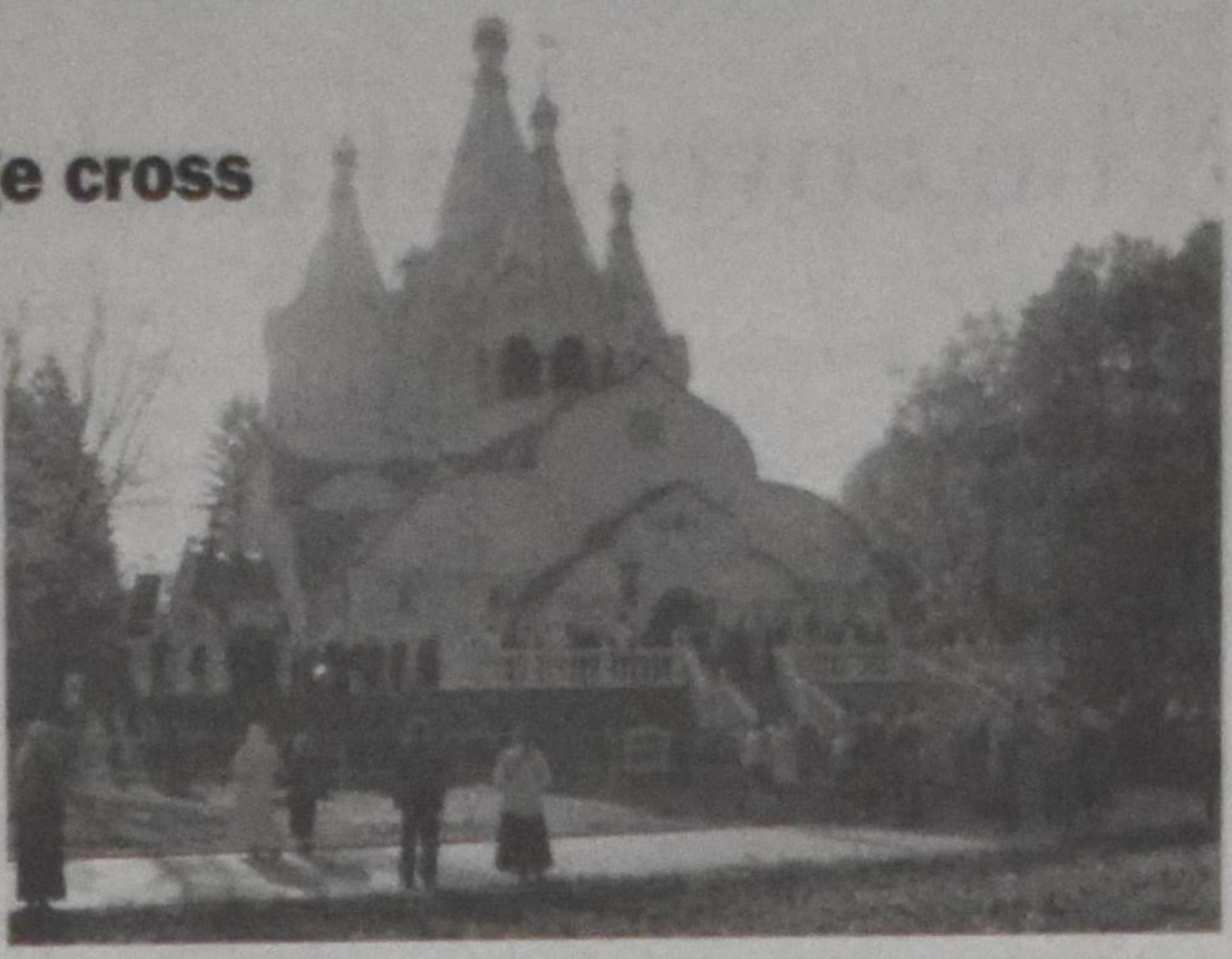
Moscow (ENI) – The Russian Orthodox Church has marked the 70th anniversary of the bloodiest peak of Josef Stalin's terror with a procession that began from a remote northern island archipelago that became the prison camp immortalised in Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's world famous book, *The Gulag Archipelago*. The procession ended on the edge of Moscow at a former "killing field" that has now become a shrine to Soviet leader Stalin's millions of victims.

The procession made its way by boat from the island of Solovki, less than 160 kilometres (100 miles) from the Arctic Circle, where a 16th century monastery in the White Sea was turned into a Soviet prison camp. It traveled along the White Sea-Baltic Canal, immortalised as Belmorkanal and built by the forced labour of prisoners incarcerated in the Soviet Gulag, or prison camp system.

A 12-metre-high wooden cross accompanied the procession to Butovo, a deceptively rustic corner south of Moscow, where mass executions began 70 years ago, on August 8 ,1937. Here, the cross was erected next to the newly built stone Church of the Resurrection and the Holy New Martyrs and Confessor of Russia.

The Rev. Kirill Kaleda, rector of the church, said the pilgrimage was "infused with a sense of tragedy and sacrifice," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, a Moscow newspaper, reported.

From August 1937 to October 1938 alone, at least 20,000 people are believed to have been shot and buried as "enemies of the people" in a field adjacent to the church. The field is known as "Butovsky poligon", or shooting range, and was a secret facility of the former KGB until the early 1990s.



On some days, hundreds were shot. Photographs of victims from their KGB case files are displayed near the field and in the church. When secret police files were uncovered after the collapse of communism, researchers discovered that one thousand of the victims were monks, nuns, priests and lay people, who were killed for their Orthodox faith.

More than 320 of these people have now been canonised, and are known as the "new martyrs" of the Russian Orthodox Church. Kaleda's grandfather, a priest named Vladimir Ambartsumov, is one of the new martyrs commemorated at Butovo.

Patriarch Aleksei II of the Russian Orthodox Church has referred repeatedly to the site as Russia's Golgotha. Every year after Easter, the patriarch presides at an open-air mass and memorial service on Butovsky poligon.

"All of Russia was Golgotha in the 20th century," said Andrei Kuznetsov, a church social worker, after this year's service. "There are special places where people didn't reject Christ. There was particular suffering on Solovki, in Yekaterinburg [where Tsar Nicholas II and his family, now saints of the church, are commemorated along with the new martyrs], and here near Moscow."

Votes on gay clergy fuel further controversy for US Lutherans

Chris Herlinger

New York (ENI) – For years, the largest Lutheran denomination in the United States has avoided some of the rancour over the issue of same-sex relationships that has divided the Episcopal (Anglican) Church and, to a lesser extent, the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Methodist Church.

Yet, given two very different decisions by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at its 2007 assembly, held from August 6 to 11 in Chicago, that could change.

The assembly voted on August 10 not to overturn the 4.8-million-member denomination's rules that bar the ordination of non-celibate homosexual clergy.

But the assembly also approved a resolution, a day later, that discourages bishops from disciplining gay clergy in committed relationships. That resolution was prompted in part by the case of an Atlanta, Georgia, ELCA pastor who faced disciplinary action earlier in 2007, after he informed his bishop of his relationship with his male partner.

Some church members believe that following the two votes, as well as the existence of more than 80 ELCA clergy and seminarians who have publicly declared their homosexuality, the denomination is likely to confront the issue of human sexuality during its next scheduled assembly in 2009 in Minneapolis. Then, the gathering is expected to debate a denominational statement being prepared on the topic.

Proponents of a change in rules for homosexual clergy welcomed the directive about the disciplining of gay clergy as a major victory, but called the assembly's action an interim move.

"Full inclusion and acceptance is still down the road, but the dam of discrimination has been broken," said Emily Eastwood, the executive director of Lutherans Concerned/North America, an advocacy group for homosexual rights. "With this decision, the voting members signaled a desire for policy change, but the need for two more years to bring more of the church along."

Another group, Lutheran CORE, that opposes giving homosexuals in the church more rights, called the two votes an example of shutting "the front door for now on allowing ministers in same-sex relationships to serve the denomination," but then telling "them to go to the back door and come in".

Jaynan Clark Egland, head of the WordAlone Network, said in a statement, "I don't know as a Christian, as a pastor and as a parent what really would be worse – a church with no Biblical standards to govern our ministry, or standards we don't intend to enforce. To refrain from discipline in the home is bad parenting, but we're about to do so in Christ's Church."

Mark S. Hanson, who the assembly re-elected for another six-year term as ELCA presiding bishop, was quoted by the church's news service as saying, "They are not words that change the standards of the church. They reflect the mind of this assembly as it seeks to give counsel to the leaders of the church."

Laotian government crackdown targets Hmong Christians

AUSTRALIA (ANS) – A Presbyterian missionary first brought the gospel to Buddhist, animist Laos in 1885. Whilst the ethnic Lao were resistant, the ethnic minorities were not. Thanks to Gospel radio and indigenous missionaries, the 20th century saw revivals amongst the Hmong and the Khmu which sometimes involved whole villages turning to Christ. During the second Indochina war the Hmong, who live in the hills that straddle northern Vietnam and Laos, joined with the American forces against the Communists. But by April 1975 the Americans had been driven out and the Communists had won. This left the Hmong in a dire situation as an ethnic and growing religious minority under vengeful Communist regimes. According to Operation World, some 90 percent of all the Laos Christian leadership were forced to flee the Communist advances, reprisals, purges and persecution of 1975.

The Laos government, still one of the world's most severe abusers of religious liberty, has explicitly declared its intention to "eliminate Christianity". The government not only severely persecutes Christians, it is also pursuing a genocidal war against the restive Hmong, using military means which include gross barbarity, chemical weapons ('yellow rain') and starvation.

In early June, ten people were arrested in California, USA, and charged with plotting a coup to overthrow the Laos government. The ringleaders of the alleged plot were Harrison Jack (60), a former US Army Ranger who led covert operations and worked with Hmong fighters during the Vietnam War, and Gen. Vang Pao (77), a prominent member of the Hmong community who emigrated to the US in the 1970s. The BBC reports that Vang Pao, as a Laotian general, led CIA-backed forces against Communist guerrillas before they seized power in 1975. According to the BBC the group is said to have spent millions of dollars on weapons and explosives.

The events in the US have triggered a major persecution against Christian Hmong in Laos, where it is assumed the Christians have US links. Compass Direct (CD) reported August 7 that Lao government soldiers and police had killed at least 13 Hmong Christians in the previous month and that some 200 members of a 1900-strong Laos Evangelical Church in Ban Sai Jarern (northwestern Laos) were imprisoned. One source told CD that police are shooting on sight Christians they are searching for intensively in rice fields and mountains. Vietnamese police and soldiers have crossed into Laos seeking Vietnamese Hmong.

The authorities are accusing the churches of being linked to Gen. Vang Pao and that the pastors are preparing their congregations to participate in the coup. The churches however flatly deny the charges and maintain that they are good, loyal, law-abiding citizens. Exploiting the situation, Communist village officials and committee members and other anti-Christian elements are agitating for a purge of Christians. Numerous church leaders have been seized. Police are pursuing others who are on the run.

On top of this, the Thai Prime Minister announced that Thailand would return some 8000 ethnic Hmong refugees to Laos despite their claims they face persecution in their homeland. World leaders generally are indifferent to what they know is happening in Laos, which will apply for membership in the World Trade Organisation in 2008.

Please pray specifically for God to protect and sustain his Church amidst this terrible persecution, especially the Christian leaders – so vital for the Church – who are being specifically targeted by the authorities, and that he may turn the hearts of world leaders from indifference to indignation that leads to action.

Note and links

Rebecca Sommer, a German-born New York-based film-maker and human rights activist, has produced a film *Hunted Like Animals* that shockingly exposes the severe trauma of the Hmong. *Hunted Like Animals* may be purchased as a DVD or watched as Quicktime clips from Rebecca Sommer's site http://www.rebeccasommer.org/documentaries/Hmong/index.php or as a series of YouTube clips http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmSWXk1nFRc&mode=related&search .

Elizabeth Kendal is researcher and writer for World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission (WEA RLC)

Sermon

The covenant and infant baptism

A sermon by
Calvin P. Van Reken*
Scripture reading:
Genesis 17 and Galatians 3

Today in the church there are many people who wonder why we baptize infants. Even some who are Christian Reformed think it acceptable, maybe even preferable, to dedicate babies. But we didn't dedicate Austin John this morning – he was baptized. God is the one who acts in baptism, the minister is only God's agent.

This morning Austin's parents did not dedicate him to God. No, this morning God did something, God claimed Austin as his very own child. Dedication is something we do. Baptism is something God does.

This morning I want to tell you why children, even infants, receive baptism. In telling you about this I will need to touch on what baptism means. For this I will need to explain the broader context, the greater reality, of which baptism is a part. Let me start, though, with the underlying reason why so many people today struggle with infant baptism. That reason is that our society is radically individualistic. The church and popular theology have been significantly affected by this individualism.

Radical individualism

At the beginning of its European immigrant origins, America was settled with people who were willing to leave the familiar surroundings of villages and cities, of family and friends, to come to the New World; striking out on their own where the success and failure, life and death, would be almost entirely up to their individual abilities. They did not and could not count on any social network to support them. It was up to each individual to make it in the world. Of course, there was cooperation, but it only worked when it was to everyone's benefit. "If I can get ahead by working with you, or helping you, then I'll do it, but not simply because of other social ties, not because you live in my village or even because we are related."

What developed then was a society where the individual's decisions were the most important in determining the course of that person's life. A society in which social ties were largely based on individual self-interest. You can see the effects of this today: while counties in Europe have become increasingly socialistic, setting up programs so that everyone has health care, retirement income, education, and the like, the US has been very reluctant to follow Europe's example. (I'm not here making any claim about whether that's good or bad, just that the US is different.)

We can see this radical individualism in our own attitudes, too. It's possible, even common, in the US for one family member to be quite wealthy, and his brothers and sisters to just struggle to get by. You may have some very wealthy friends, but they probably have never given you any money. Our idea is that each person is responsible for his or her own success and failure, even members of the same family.

It's quite different in other places. In parts of Africa, if one family member starts a business and has success, all his family members, relatives, even fellow tribes members will come to him with expectations of help. One person cannot succeed unless everyone in his clan does. This makes it very hard to succeed, to build and accounts in part for some of the financial troubles in Africa.

The reason people have a problem with infant baptism

Now, what does this have to do with infant baptism? Well, individualism says each person stands or dies on his/her own merits. Apply that to Christianity and it means each person as an individual stands or falls on his/her own. It isn't your family, or relatives, or church that secures your salvation, you must do it yourself.

Wait a minute, though, we Protestants know the basic teaching of salvation – that it is not earned at all, it is by God's grace in Jesus Christ through faith. The requirement on our part is to have faith, so radical individualism concludes each individual must have personal faith to be saved. Now little children do not have any faith in Jesus, a three-month old can hardly frame even simple ideas, he's not at a stage of basic recognition of what is familiar and what is not. The fact that small infants can't have any faith in Jesus seems to imply that they can't be saved – so they shouldn't be baptized.

Let me make it clear, the main reason people in the US object to baptizing infants is due to the influence of radical individualism which says each and every individual needs to have faith of his or her own to be saved. Now, while radical individualism may be a good way to think if you want a prosperous society, it isn't the basis for how God thinks or acts. So let's consider the account in the Bible in which God explains how he planned to save us.

God's deep and wide covenant

In Genesis 17, God confirms his covenant with Abraham. A covenant is sometimes said to be like a contract where each party promises something and agrees to some conditions. A person could have a contract to supply windows for a new house, that's his side of the deal and in return he will get paid. But we didn't really have a contract with God Almighty; he simply announces what he will do and what our responses to him must be.

Look at what God says in verse 7 of Genesis 17. "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." Here you should note four things. First, that God establishes his covenant. It isn't contingent on Abraham, it doesn't depend on his descendants, God establishes it. Second, it is an everlasting covenant, it is established by God. He makes it and he will never let go of the promises included in it. Third, one promise that God makes is that he will be Abraham's God. That is, Abraham will belong to God. This is a promise of salvation. Fourth and important for us this morning as we consider infant baptism, the covenant is not just between God and Abraham but "Abraham and his descendants for the generations to come."

God doesn't just think in terms of individuals, his eye is on whole generations of a family. God not only makes promises to living persons, but to future generations. His covenant grace is deep; it is generational.

The idea is rather simple, really. Remember, being in the covenant means you belong to God. Now suppose someone, say Bob, is a rancher and Bob owns a herd of cattle that roam around the range. They all have Bob's brand on them. One day Bob is out checking his herd and he finds that some new calves were born. Now consider this: to whom do the calves belong? Is this a hard question? Bob doesn't think, "When these calves grow up I can buy them." He doesn't worry that they don't have his brand on them. Rather he rounds up the new calves and puts his brand on them, they belong to him. Infant baptism is God putting his name on a child who belongs to him. He is claiming a child as his own. He shows us that the child is in the covenant.

In Genesis 17, God goes on to tell Abraham that the sign of this everlasting covenant is to be circumcised. Each of Abraham's male descendants must receive circumcision when they are eight days old. This was branding them physically so that they would be identifiable as belonging to God. And Abraham is told not just to circumcise his own sons, but anyone in his household.

Listen to Genesis 17:13 – "Whether born in your household or bought with your own money they must be circumcised." You see, the covenant extends not only to Abraham and his sons but to anyone that belongs to Abraham. It makes sense, what belongs to Abraham, belongs to God, because all belongs to God.

God's covenant of grace is not only deep, extending through all generations, it is also wide. It includes even those who are not, physically speaking, the children of Abraham. And right after explaining circumcision to Abraham, God goes on to make it clear that girls and women are in the covenant too. He tells Abraham that her name will not be Sarah. He gives her a new name. Who gave you your name? Wasn't it your parents? The ones you belong to? So by renaming Sarah, God makes it clear that Sarah is also in his covenant.

So God's plan of salvation is to make a covenant with Abraham, to be his God to save him and his wife, his sons, his daughters, his servants; down through the generations, long after Abraham himself is dead. God's salvation extends to all who are connected to Abraham,

Covenant "connections"

Now this seems to our ears rather unfair. Why should Abraham's great-grandson be included in God's covenant, while some other person's grandchild is not included? It would be fairer to let each person decide for himself or herself whether he or she wants to be in the covenant. Then it would be each person's choice rather than what ancestral connections you have. You see, our radical individualism finds a flaw in God's plan. Salvation is too important; it shouldn't be based on what connections you have.

The fact is, though, that a lot of other important things that happen to a person are because of their connections to others, not because of any individual choice. My great-grandparents packed up and left the Netherlands and moved to the US. As a result, I am a citizen of the USA, not the Netherlands. I'm a member of the CRC, not the Protestant Church of the Netherlands. I went to Calvin College, not the Free University in Amsterdam. My parents decided to live in the suburbs of Chicago, so I cheer for the Chicago Bears and the Bulls and the Blackhawks. Not for the Detroit Lions, Pistons, or Red Wings. When the University of Michigan plays Michigan State, I hope they both lose.

All of these facts about me can be traced to a decision that my great-grandparents made, I had no voice in their choice, but it

Sermon/Poem

had a great effect on my life. It's true in all our lives that who we are connected to makes a lot of difference.

It's also true in the Bible. Consider how the fortunes of Israel would ebb and flow depending on what sort of king they had. If they had an evil king, they would soon have trouble in their lives. God's judgment affected the whole nation. Foreign peoples would invade and threaten Israel or Judah. Living under a bad king meant a more difficult life, perhaps even an early death.

A second and important case in the Bible is the fall into sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, every one of their descendants, including you and me, were seriously affected. Our lives were altered for the worse, far worse. Instead of loving God and each other, we are born with a disposition to hate God and to hate others.

We got this disposition to be self-centered and fearful because of a decision of Adam and Eve. But we had no part of it, did we? We weren't back there in the garden, chosing to sin against God. Why should we have to suffer so because of the decision of someone else? Well, because we are connected to Adam and Eve, they are our parents and what they decided effects us. So the idea that Abraham's descendants are favored by being included in the covenant with God, even though they didn't choose it fits a pattern we know. God does not deal with us based only/primarily on the choices we each make individually. He works with families, communities, nations, and humankind as a whole.

If we now look at Galatians 3, we can see how God's covenant was advanced perfectly in Jesus Christ.

Connected to Jesus by faith

Jesus, a descendant of Abraham, came into our sinful mess and lived a perfect life; he died as a sacrifice for the sins of those who belong to God and he rose again. The connection that matters for salvation is not a blood connection to Abraham, but a faith connection to Abraham's seed, believing not just that he died but that he's living today. Such faith connects us to him and all the promises and benefits that he has earned – salvation, peace, joy, contentment, an eternal home. These belong to us as well because we are connected to him. We are not physical descendants of Jesus – our connection is not one of blood – our connection is by faith.

That brings us back to the question, though; don't we as individuals need to have faith to be connected to Jesus? To be baptized? The straight answer is – NO.

Remember God works through families and communities; families with a true faith, communities of faith. What belongs to a family of faith and to a community of faith – belongs to God. Sometimes a person will reject the faith of his or her family and break off any connection with the community of faith. When that happens, we don't know exactly what to say. God knows who belongs to him – we can't always tell, but usually we can. A child in a Christian home is a child of the covenant – there's faith in that home. A family or a person who chooses to identify with a community of faith – there's faith there, too.

The problem with our radical individualism is that it robs us of the comfort and consolation of God's grace so often because we know ourselves too well – our sin and lack of faith – to be comfortable with the idea that our future condition and our eternal destiny depends on us. If you are baptized into Christ Jesus your connection to him by faith is what makes all the difference.

The child that was baptized this morning is too little to have his own faith yet. Someday you may be too old and perhaps you may not be able to remember who you are. Sometimes even now you may be overwhelmed and wonder whether you have faith.

Remember, what matters is that you belong to Jesus, that you are connected to him, not just as an individual, but because you are a member of his family. You have been baptized, and God has placed the mark of his ownership on you. So even when your faith wavers, or your mind wanders, or your life seems headed in the wrong direction, you need to know that you belong body and soul to your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. This is our only comfort in life and death.

**Dr. Van Reken delivered this sermon at Beckwith Hills Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan, earlier this year.*

Walking the beans

I spent a summer on the farm
when I was in my teens.
My uncle taught me how to chore
and how to 'walk the beans'.

Now walking beans sounds like a job
for which you'd volunteer,
but if my uncle asks for help,
just hide or disappear.

You walk the fields from dusk to dawn.
Your back gets stiff and sore.
And when you've pulled up all the weeds,
He says, "Let's do some more."

One day my uncle looked at me
and sadly shook his head.
He said, "Your hands are blistered bad.
You're walking like you're dead.

Tomorrow, boy, you take the Ford
to Gertrude's place and crimp,
then I won't have to hear you gripe
or watch that awful limp."

He said, "Be sure to check the gas
and get an early start.
I'm sure that you can find her place,
your mother says you're smart."

I rose before the crack of dawn
and hustled through my chores,
then rushed out to the tractor shed
and opened up the doors.

I choked the Ford. It started up.
I hooked it to the crimper.
I made a couple snide remarks
and heard my cousins whimper.

I settled in the padded seat
and headed three miles west.
To rest from pulling jimson weeds
made me feel truly blessed.

I found the field, went to work
and started crimping hay.
I drove around the new mown field
and sniffed the sweet bouquet.

The tractor sputtered, spit, and coughed,
then died there in the grass
and suddenly it dawned on me –
I hadn't checked the gas.

A lump welled up inside my throat.
A tear fell from my eye.
I took a stick and checked the tank
and found that it was dry.

I walked toward home, across the hills,
beneath the broiling sun.
The day had started out so well,
but now it wasn't fun.

By the time I'd finally made it home,
I thought of every factor,
but Uncle Paul just grinned and said,
"Hey boy, you've lost your tractor."

I told him I'd run out of fuel.
He sighed, I heard him groan.
"Do you have brains inside your head,
or is there only bone?"

He said, "Go fill some gas cans up.
The red ones. In the shed."
And then he mumbled other things
that are better left unsaid.

I filled two great big cans with gas
And set them in the truck.
I threw a rock at Uncle's dog
and kicked Aunt Beulah's duck.

He came out of the kitchen door.
He stopped and lit his pipe.
I crawled inside the pickup truck,
prepared to hear him gripe.

He called to me, "I know you're slow.
You're just a poor beginner.
But if you don't start walking, boy,
you won't get home for dinner."

I jumped out of the pickup truck.
My face was brightest red.
I grabbed those stupid cans of gas
and down the lane I sped.

My blistered hands were bleeding bad
when I got to the Ford;
my aching muscles screamed for rest –
they would not be ignored.

I poured the gas into the tank,
then fell down in a heap.
I thought I'd rest my eyes a bit,
but I fell fast asleep.

I woke up sometime after lunch,
aghast to see the time.
If Uncle Paul would kill me now,
they'd acquit him of the crime.

I crimped those acres in high gear.
I stirred up lots of dust,
and as I zipped around the field
beneath my breath, I cussed.

When I got home at six o'clock,
my uncle said, "We ate.
We didn't know when you'd get back.
Those pork chops tasted great."

I washed the blood and grime away,
then sat down at the table.
My uncle said, "Your chores aren't done,
and could you muck the stable?"

At summer's end, he wrote a check
for more money than I'd seen.
He placed it in my calloused hands
and didn't seem so mean.

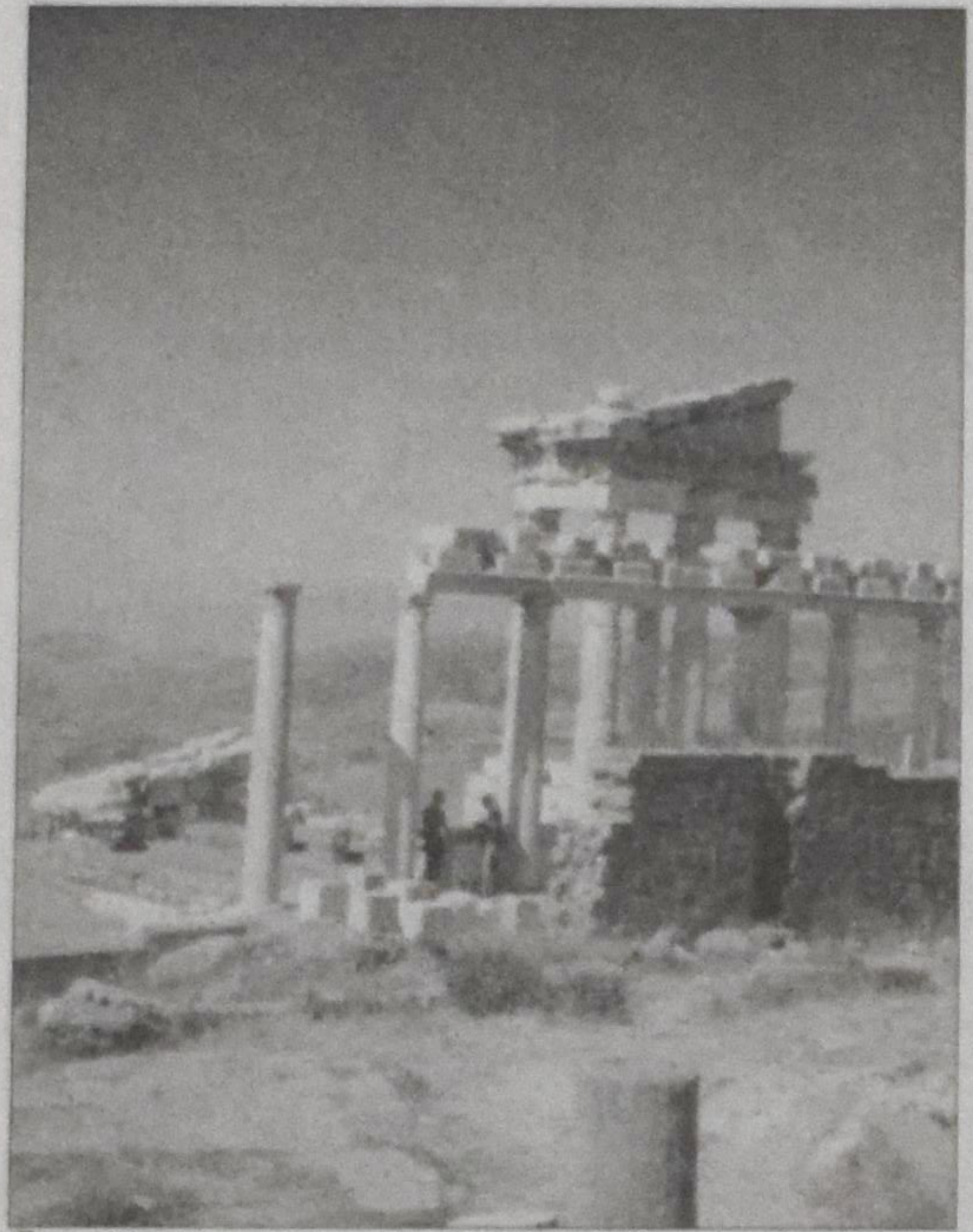
He said, "It's hard to teach you, kid,
all the lessons you should know,
but I hope you've learned a thing or two
that'll help you as you grow."

Today, it's true, I drive too fast.
I weave and honk and pass.
But there's one thing I never do
and that's run out of gas.

Rodney J. Hugen

Travel

Ancient landscapes, new sounds


Pergamum

Before studying about Turkey this winter
And going on this trip in May
Turkey was a vague place out there somewhere.
Bordering on Syria, Iraq, Iran and Russia
Our kids said, "You're going there?"
We're very glad we went.
We thoroughly enjoyed being with our tour group
As we experienced this interesting piece of creation together.
The east so rugged
Where families rode on their tractors back to town at night
Or in wagons behind their horse
Worked together in the fields
Even one woman behind a horse and plow
In the strange landscape of Cappadocia
With its underground cities built into the soft tufa rock
The west and south so fruitful
Growing all the food the people need
Figs, olives, tomatoes, apricots, oranges
We will never forget the colourful markets
Fresh fish and fruit
Scarves, carpets, pottery and spices.
The incredible buffets of salads, hot dishes, desserts
Lentil and yogurt soup
Adam's apples
The new things we experienced
The boat ride through the Bosphorous
With grand old buildings on both sides
A Turkish bath
The amplified call to prayer
Not from Jack Hielema
But from the loud speakers
in the minarets beside the mosques
The women with their headscarves
And those without
And the challenges surrounding this
The interesting ruins of ancient places
We had read about in the Bible
And the many interesting parts of creation
That we witnessed
What will remain with me
Is that each time I read Ephesians
Colossians, Acts or Revelation
The Roman Empire will be hovering over the pages
I will imagine the hairs rising on the necks
Of the early Christians
As they listen to Paul talking "of bringing all things
in heaven and on earth
together under one head, even Christ"
What a treasonous statement
When Caesar Augustus was the ruler to be worshipped.
When there were altars to the god Zeus
the gods were not to be offended
Or the harvests might be poor
Yet more and more people believed in Jesus
Even in these circumstances
Hid in underground cities dug into the soft tufa rock
In the volcanic terrain of Cappadocia
They survived through torturous times
And events where they were the entertainment
In the large amphitheatres
that seated 10,000 people
But then a Roman Emperor,Constantine,
Became a Christian because of his Christian mother
And made Christianity the religion of Asia Minor
How the beautiful church of St. Sophia in Istanbul
Was at one time the largest church in the world.
How we saw it the first night out our window at supper
Its lights in the mist beside the Blue Mosque
And thought how the trip was already worth it
How Christianity survived when some people were
deciding what was true and what wasn't
Was Jesus really God?
So God provided
People Like Justinian
A conference at Nicea
And the Nicean Creed
Saying Jesus and God are one.
I know I"m not martyr material
And that makes me even more amazed
How God can make people strong enough
To be faithful even to death.
The story of Polycarp
A disciple of St. John
And a bishop in Smyrna
Will always stay with me.
Before being burned at the stake he said;
"For eighty-six years I have been his servant
and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme
my King, who has saved me?"

My husband Jack and I went on a trip to Turkey with a tour group, hosted by Pastor Jack and Alice Hielema. We visited some of the sites of the seven churches in Revelation and some of the places where Paul journeyed. Prior to this, I did some reading. Two of the books were: *Colossians Remixed*, by Sylvia Keesmaat and Brian Walsh, and *Joy in Our Weakness*, by Marva Dawn.

Before our trip, when reading Colossians or Ephesians, I never felt the weight of the Roman Empire and the critical, delicate task that Paul was involved in, bringing the news of Jesus into this area.

A fictionalized account of life in Colossae at the time of Paul in the book *Colossians Remixed*, describes Nympha's thoughts about a conversation she had with Lydia, a seller of purple:

"Lydia had offered a challenge to my faith in the empire. I knew that her story and mine couldn"t both be true. Either Caesar had brought forgiveness of our sins, fruitfulness and peace through the great victories he had wrought, or Jesus had brought forgiveness of our sins, fruitfulness and peace through his paradoxical victory on a Roman cross. But this seemed impossible, unimaginable!"(p. 55) "What Lydia was telling me was nothing less than treasonous, a threat to the empire."(p.54)

Nympha is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians. Colossae was destroyed by an earthquake around 60 AD and has never been excavated.(p.58 Colossians Remixed).

Laodicea, ten miles from Colossae, was a very rich city. "The problem with the believers in Laodicea, Marva Dawn wrote, "was that they had too many things going for them. Because the city was so prosperous, they weren't aware of their desperate need for grace."

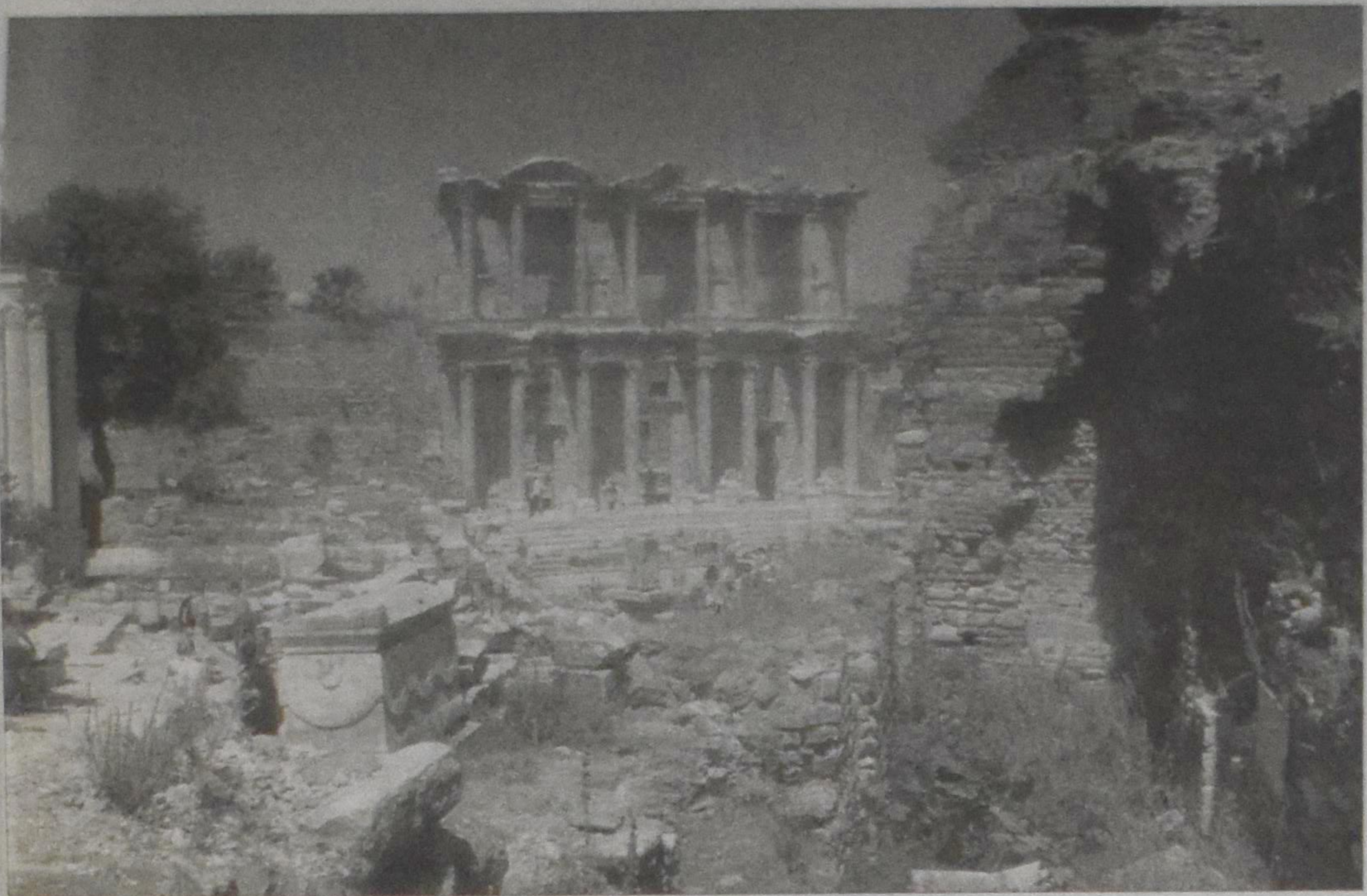
Geographically Laodicea was between Colossae, known for its cold, pure water, and Hierapolis, a hot mineral springs. The water in Laodicea came through aqueducts from springs six miles away. It was lukewarm.

Laodicea

We walked the dusty path
To where the archaeologists
Were unearthing remains of this city.
A "no photo" restriction on some of these sites.
Archaeologists want the first published photos
Where they have been carefully digging
With their trowels
Brushing away centuries of dust
With their small brooms
Labelling
Cataloguing the marble pieces
Buried crockery
Perhaps handled by Christians.
Vessels that held lukewarm water
Which had travelled miles
through aqueducts.
Not fresh cold water
Like the Colossians drank
Ten miles away
Or healing hot water
From the nearby hot springs.
In the letter to Laodicea
He called them lukewarm
Like their water.
They lacked passion.
He wanted to spit them out.

Pergamum

Above the city of Bergama
(sounds Dutch doesn"t it?)
on a high hill are the ruins of Pergamum
one of the seven churches
praised for remaining true to Christ
even in their circumstances.
The bus took us part way up the hill
and then we walked up to the top
overlooking a very steep
amphitheatre in the hillside,
the city and valley below.
Marble columns stood behind us
white in the sun against a deep blue sky.
Red poppies grew in the dry grass.
Pergamum was once a city devoted
to politics, gods, knowledge and health.
The letter refers to it as the throne of Satan.
There was a temple to the Emperor Augustus
who they said could forgive sins.
There was an altar to the god Zeus
who Alexander the Great and other leaders
claimed as a forefather.
The city was dedicated to learning
with the second largest library
in the world at the time.
The city was devoted to mental health


Library in Ephesus

with a medical center down the hill,
the sanctuary of Asclepius, the healer god.
Pergamum was considered a tolerant society
which accommodated other beliefs and religions
as long as people also worshipped the emperor.
That"s where some of the Christians were challenged,
pulled along by the culture,
giving in a little at a time
like the people at the time of Balaam.
The letter warned them
not to be gradually led astray
by the powers around them.
Hang on to your faith people of Pergamum
and Christ willl give you a white stone
with your name on it.

Smyrna

The only one of the seven churches still alive.
The Turkish name for Smyrna is Izmir
A beautiful port city on the Aegean Sea.
Inside this city the church
surrounded by a wall.
We rang the bell
waited until someone came to the door
and ushered us through a courtyard
into the sanctuary.
The church ceiling covered with paintings
Of Jesus'life
Of Mary and the saints:
Of Polycarp a bishop of Smyrna
A disciple of John
A teacher of Irenaeus
painted in flames at the stake.
Unwilling to deny Christ.
All the books carry his last words:
"For eighty-six years I have been his servant
and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme
my King, who has saved me?"
One said,
"Flames enveloped him like the sails of a ship"
another "flames shot around him like a veil
but his body would not burn".
A soldier took out his sword
and ended his life.

"Be faithful"
said the letter
"and I will give you the crown of life."
No fear of not having done enough.
No irresponsibility because Christ has done it already.
But "Be faithful".

Sardis

The letter to Sardis is a wake-up call.
Jews from Babylon after the exile
Were part of the population.
A partially restored synagogue
Still remains.
Whether they were part of the churches
That were built later we do not know.
Paul often went to places
where there were already Jews,
But sometimes the Jews were against him
As much as the Romans.

The Revelation letter says:
"You have the reputation of being alive
But you are dead."
You"re going through the motions
But there is no spiritual life.
Wake up! Strengthen what remains
Before it is too late.

Philadelphia

for Jack S.
You were standing beyond the gigantic yellow roses
Flanked by the ruins of the church of Philadelphia
Reading the letter to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation.
Eveline and I were late
Sidetracked by four local children.
"Hello! Hello!" They said
Practicing their English.
"What is your name?
Do you have sugar?"
My camera battery too dead to take their picture.
The new battery not found in time to take yours.
But we caught the last words you read,
"Blessed is the one reading and those hearing the words"

No church bells

After reading about the church bells in Italy in Vicky Van Andel's article it struck me that we never heard church bells in Turkey. Several times a day, the call to prayer was amplified over the loudspeakers from the minarets but never church bells. Only once did we photograph an Orthodox church, and although we saw all the sites of six of the seven churches in Revelation, only one of them was still alive.

So insidious this gradual creeping in of Moslem standards, that our Turkish guide warned us to not be so sure it couldn't happen in Canada.

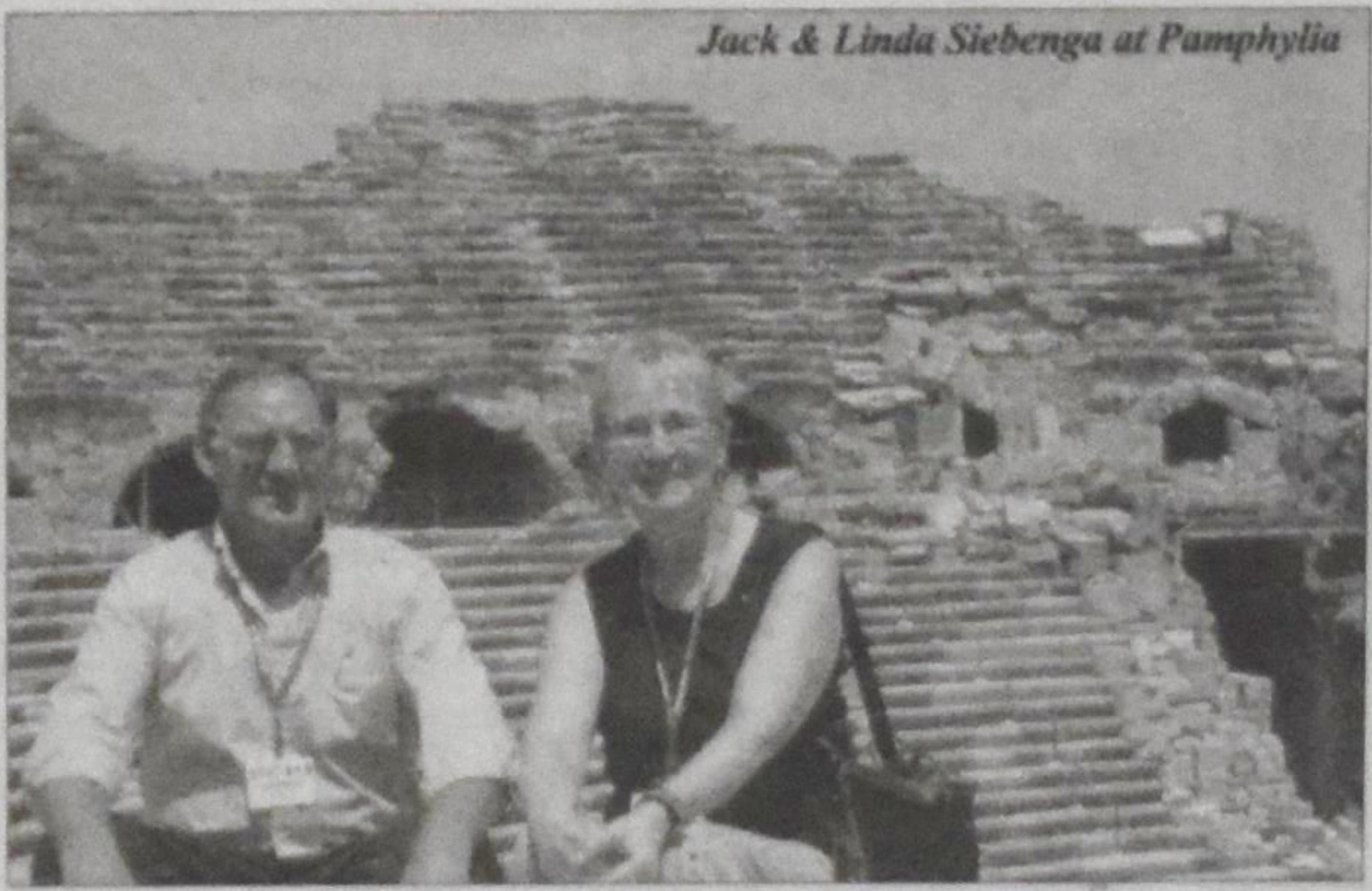
Since we've been home we've had reminders of his words. Tolerance by politicians of parades where radical extremist terrorists are exalted. Tolerance to adapt our standards to allow headscarves in soccer and turbans in positions of authority. Even the 600 Moslem girls now playing soccer in Afghanistan are not required to wear headscarves. Only in the Canadian airport did we see turbaned employees.

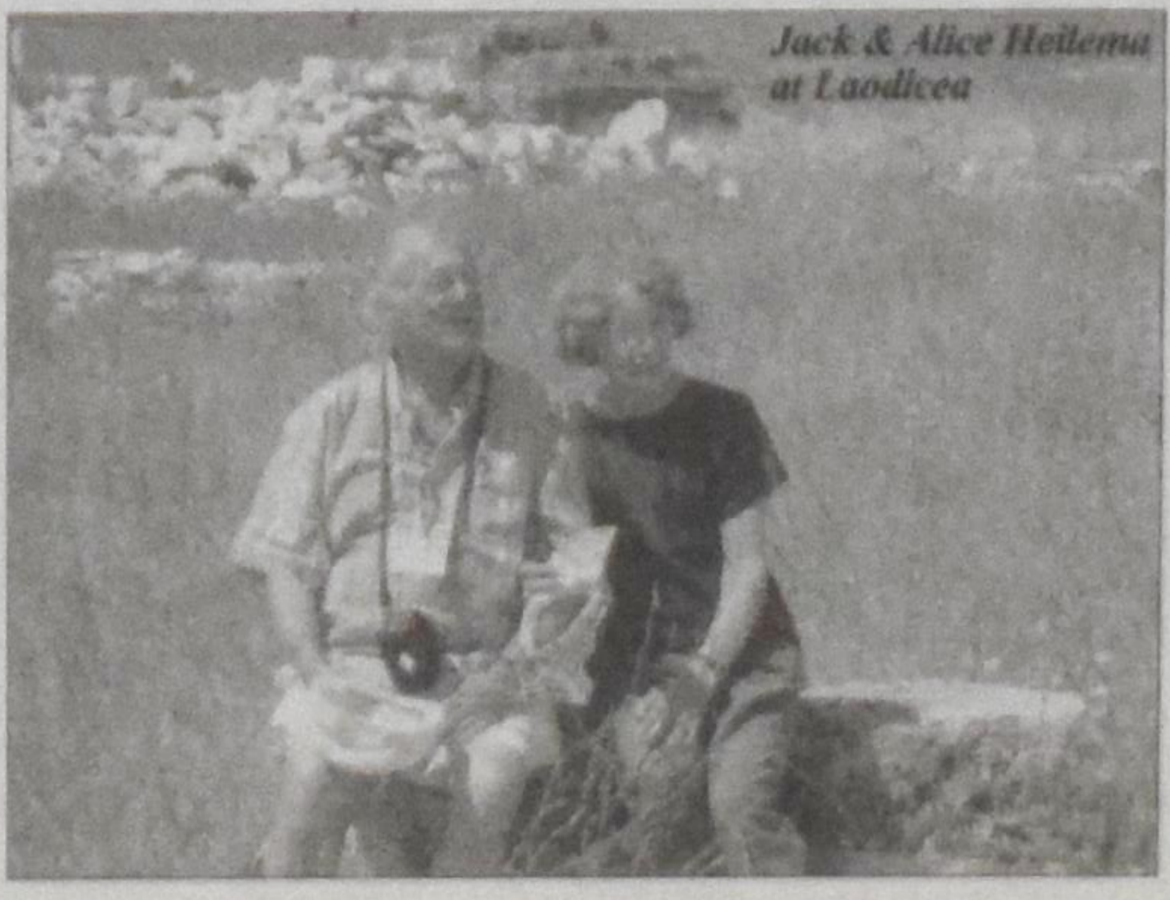
While we were in Turkey the third peaceful protest demonstration occurred, orchestrated by the women of Turkey. This time in the city of Izmir where we were staying. Our bus took us out to Ephesus that day so we did not witness the million and a half people that came out to **say,** we want to keep our politics separate from religion. We do not want a leader whose wife is a "head-scarf-wearing woman". We are afraid that the leadership will force in more measures to support the fundamentalists who also have links to Al Qeda.

Turkish women want to prevent the scenarios happening in Lebanon recently when women reporters were warned violent things would happen to them if they did not wear head scarves. The head scarf has become more than a modest head covering or a statement of faith. It is used in some cases as a symbol of suppression.

We talk so much about making our borders safe and then walk hand in hand with promoters of violence without saying, "This is where Canada stands. We will not tolerate things that do not promote peace and freedom in our country."

Linda Siebenga


Jack & Linda Siebenga at Pamphylia


Jack & Alice Heilema at Laodicea

Ecclesiastes

Dying and death as mystery

and the dust returns to the ground it came from,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.
Ecclesiastes 12:7

A. A. van Ruler

In the preceding verses the Preacher has depicted ageing and dying using numerous figures of speech and images. Now it seems as if he decides to put into plain words what happens when a person dies.

Does he succeed? Does his statement that dust returns to the ground and the spirit returns to God unveil the mystery of death and dying? Or are these just more images and metaphors?

At first glance we might be tempted to say that the second part may be figurative but not the first part. We could argue that the bit about the spirit returning to God is only a figure of speech that enables us to talk around the issue somewhat. On the other hand, the bit about returning to the ground is at least clear and plain language. It puts an end to all figures of speech. It tells us literally what dying is: dust returning to the ground it came from. We can see it happening with our eyes, whether a person is buried or cremated.

Joseph Wright The Old Man and Death *of 1774 – 76*

But is this true? Is this a literal description of death? Are we free here of all images and metaphors? Does the statement that dust returns to the ground it came from tells us exactly what happens at death? Are there no mysteries here?

Was this little pile of dust my body – my living, throbbing, growing, vital body? And was my body my self? Is it I who return to the earth?

This strikes me as a strange notion. If so, isn't the description of death as a return to dust a rather feeble attempt to describe it and not at all precise?

It is only one side of the matter. It is the side that we see. We see the dust returning to the ground, but this dust was my body, and that body was me. Is it I who gets swept up after death like a street sweeper cleans the street? Is that me in my own selfhood?

Admittedly, even today we continue to speak in such image and metaphors. Yet, these only lift a tip of the veil that is the mystery of death. However, this does not mean that what is expressed in these figures isn't true. The dust does indeed return to the earth. Who'd wish to deny it? We are, after all, dust, dust and earth, dust and ashes. Where else would we come from except from the earth?

This is why the Preacher expressly adds [where] "it came from." Once the dust that we are was in the earth. It was simply part of the earth. Then it become a body, and then a human being. This being praised his Creator, but then he died and the dust once again returned to the earth. Dust to dust and earth to earth. Everything back to what it was, as if he had never existed.

However, exist he did. Human life is no vain dream. It is a genuine reality. It can never be undone that this handful of dust has been human, has thought and acted, willed and loved. Nevertheless, it is true that this handful of dust does return to the earth, where it began.

Described in this simple way, the mystery of death is felt more deeply as mystery in all its unfathomableness. For when we stop to think of it, this is a startling thing: first, that a pile of dust can become a body and that body can say call itself "me", and then that it can once again wither away into dust and return to the earth. This is the mystery of life and of our humanity. It is also the mystery of dying and death.

The last mystery is no less of a mystery than the first. Some even conclude that they are one and the same mystery. But it strikes me as impossible to deny that it is a mystery. Anyone who suggests that our make-up as dust and our return to dust is too obvious to matter is playing dumb. He has stopped thinking things through. He has become superficial. For there are numerous reasons for us to be filled with awe and wonder.

This must have been how the Preacher experienced dust to dust. So he adds another statement. He says, "the spirit returns to God who gave it." What does he mean by that?

One thing he doesn't mean, I'm sure, is that this spirit is what is truly the human being while the body is nothing more than a wrapping which we can happily allow to return to the earth, while the real self returns to God. That's impossible, for we did not come from God.

We aren't brought by a stork or found behind a cabbage, and neither do we come from the being of God or from heaven. When we dig right down to the bottom of things, we come from nothing. But, staying a little closer to home, we come from the ground.

Our Creator called us into being out of nothing. He shaped us from the clay and he blew the breath of life into our nostrils. That's how we became living souls. He gave us the spirit. He gave us his own Spirit. This is how we became human beings, bodily beings, living bodies, living souls. At death he takes his Spirit back. It was given us on loan only for a time.

These too are but images and metaphors. They are theological words. But we can also say that they are poetic words. But as we saw, when we say that we are dust and will return to dust, this is both poetic and theological language. They are images and metaphors and not a bit more scientific and precise.

We do need both groups of images, those of the dust and those of the Spirit, to fully and accurately express the mystery of life and of death. Without the Spirit we are also nothing, just as we are nothing without the dust of the earth. The Spirit turns the lump of clay into a body. The Spirit animates the body, makes it live, strive, will, act and speak. Without the Spirit, that is, without God, it is impossible to discuss the mystery of being human.

So theology is not just an extravagant luxury. Only when we speak theologically do we speak fulsomely. This is true of faith, religion, church, churchgoing and the liturgy. These aren't just hobbies engaged in by some gullible people. They are essential factors in coming to our genuine and full humanity. Anyone who wishes to fully say "human being" must also say "God". He gave us the Spirit who makes us what we are.

Does this solve everything? Do we know and understand everything once we participate in the theological perspective? No, on the contrary. This only formulates all things in the fullness of their mystery. We *are* things much more than we can *speak* them. And we *speak* them more than we can *think* them. In this way, the unfathomableness of things remains the core and essence of all things.

The same is true of the mystery of death and dying. Does the Preacher solve the mystery when he says, "The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it"? It doesn't look that way. He has only led us to feel the unfathomable depth of that mystery that a person dies and how that is possible.

The Creator takes back his Spirit from this human creature and then that creature, who is dust, returns to the ground it came from. Nevertheless, he remains God's creature. He has really and truly been here in all his gravity and glory. That can never be undone. And beyond this, the Creator remains faithful to the creature he has made.

God is a God of the living and not of the dead, says Jesus, and therefore we live in him alone.

The Martha problem

Daphne Simpkins

Mildred Budge knew she had a problem with serving others; she just didn't know how to solve it.

She didn't mind caregiving of any kind; it was just the opposite. Mildred Budge couldn't stop trying to be helpful, at times, inappropriately.

Just the other day at a fellowship lunch, she had reached over and cut up the meat on the plate of a deacon. He had glared at her and said, "I can cut my own meat and tie my own shoes."

Miss Budge had slunk away to the kitchen where she had overheard two people talking about women who had so little self-respect that they couldn't stay out of the kitchen. She was pretty sure they were talking about her. She dropped off her dirty dishes – fought the fierce desire to wash them herself – then left, feeling pale.

But the final moment of conviction that she needed to modify her Martha-esque impulses occurred after she happened upon a family from out of town who had been involved in a car accident.

Naturally, she stopped, called a tow truck for them, and invited them all to her home for a cooked lunch, which was Samaritan-okay. But then, feeling a rush of ecstasy over the perfection of her steaming cornbread which really did turn out superbly, Miss Budge couldn't let hot buttered cornbread with black-eye peas be enough. No! At the end of the meal, she asked chirpily, "While you're waiting on your car to be repaired, would you like to take baths?"

Taken aback, the family of four had turned down her offer to get naked in a strange place, asked immediately that she call a taxi to take them to the garage where their car was, adamantly refused her offer to ferry them in her car, and then moved to wait by the front door, nervous smiles fixed on their glassy-eyed faces.

Miss Budge didn't blame them. She really didn't know why she had offered them baths. She didn't want to have to do all of that laundry later.

But she had offered, and now she was left with the persistent questions that plagued women like her and Martha from the Bible who fretted over domestic work and frequently pestered others with offers of unnecessary help: 'Did she need gratitude?' Or was the problem worse? Miss Budge gulped: 'Was she trying to earn grace?'

She didn't know – but sometimes she hated herself for trying to be more helpful than the occasion merited. When Miss Budge hated herself for trying to feed, doctor, and bathe strangers unreasonably, she couldn't sleep. Then the next day, she didn't feel like helping people. But there were many people in her daily orbit who counted on her consistent helpfulness.

On those days, their expectations made her irritable. Since anger leads to sin, Miss Budge necessarily had to repent. She explained herself to Jesus as helpfully as she knew how: "I'm not tired of doing good works, you see; I just want to do the good works appointed for me. I am not tired of running the race set before me either; I just want to run the race you approve of. I am tired," she said, "of being that Martha-kind

of woman that didn't exactly annoy you, but you did say that Mary chose the better way," she recalled softly. "What is that?"

How could one find that better way? She wondered.

Miss Budge decided to make some decisions that would govern her actions.

Initially, she decided to stop carrying temptation around with her in the form of bottles of water in the trunk of her car, even though she had recently been stuck on the interstate in a traffic jam in hundred degree heat and was thirsty enough to drink some. In retrospect, it did seem imprudent to have gotten out of her car and walked down the interstate handing out bottles of warm water to other trapped, thirsty drivers.

And, she was going to stop stacking the dirty dishes on her table at restaurants just because the waitress appeared overworked.

And, at fellowship suppers, she would not be the first person to jump up and offer to fetch more coffee or cake for anyone nearby.

And, when she was at the home of another church lady whose turn it was to play hostess, she was not going to pester the appointed Martha-for-the-Day with repeated offers of table service while six other church ladies sat peacefully at the dining table, graciously allowing themselves to be served. There was a balance to be found in giving and receiving, serving and being served, and Mildred Budge was going to seek, knock, and find it.

That was her initial, prayerful plan, and she concluded it with a solemn promise: "Jesus, I will try to choose the better way that you told Martha existed. She believed you. So do I."

Then, later that very afternoon as she drove home from her quilting class, Miss Budge saw a beggar standing on the side of the road. As she read the familiar message on the card he held – Will Work For Food – Miss Budge recalled bleakly that she had no bottle of water to hand him and he had to be thirsty, and she had only the bag of dog food in the backseat that she used to fill the empty bowls of dogs whose owners worked during the day, and that wouldn't do, of course. But she did have some emergency cash for gasoline in the small compartment near her left hand. It wasn't much though.

Hoping that her right hand wouldn't know what her left hand was doing, Miss Budge slowed down, crumpled the ten dollar bill into a tidy ball, and flipped the money out the window to the fellow who was most likely a drug addict or a con man (everyone said that's who those men were, but how is one to know?).

Then feeling unwise, if not a failure, Miss Budge prayed inexplicably, "Jesus, pretend you didn't see that."

Be a Crossing Bridge

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When I was a child, I perfected my flying leap. If there were nighttime monsters underneath my bed, they weren't going to get me! I outsmarted them. Instead of walking up to the shadowy edge of the bed and climbing in, I hurdled over the inky chasm from a short distance away – sensing the monsters' tentacles, paws, and fangs – and landed squarely on my bed. I knew that if I leapt too far, I would catapult over the other side of the bed and meet my doom.

For many children returning to school in September feels like a flying leap over treacherous monsters. Meeting new friends, having a different teacher, and dealing with more difficult academic work form a sharp contrast to the lazy days of summer, characterized by relaxed schedules, the presence of parents or familiar caregivers, and the absence of academic stress.

As Christian parents, we know that our children don't have to live their lives making precarious flying leaps over their fears, never sure whether they'll successfully secure safety on the other side. Because we view reality with spiritual eyes, we can assure our children that through us and their teachers God will provide a safe bridge to cross over fears that might accompany a new school year.

In *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys From Sudan*, one of the authors, Benson Deng, relates a story that gives a vivid picture of adults serving as bridges over a terrifying situation for vulnerable children. Deng writes about the Lost Boys and other refugees fleeing across the Pochala River from the Ethiopian army: "As we tried to cross over to Pochala town, the current waited for us, wanting to break our fragile bones on its deadly rocks. . . . Our teachers came to the rescue and stood where the current wanted to engulf us. Our legs quivered as we held hands from one teacher to another, but many of us were not strong enough to make our skinny feet stick on those enormous smooth rocks and many slid over. . . . The teachers did their best. They stood all day as the twenty thousand of us took our turns. They were our guiding heroes, our crossing bridge" (by Benson Deng, Alephonsion Deng, and Benjamin Ajak, with Judy A. Bernstein, Public Affairs, 2005, pp. 142).

How can you be a God-honouring crossing bridge for your child as he or she faces fears at the beginning of a new school year?

Begin by emulating God's approach to fear. The Bible teaches that fear is a consequence of sin. Adam verbalized humanity's first acknowledgement of fear when he said to God, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid" (Gen. 3: 10). Throughout the biblical narrative, God recognizes his children's fear. He doesn't ignore it or tell them to repress it. Instead, he calls it forth from quaking hearts into the light of day and repeatedly says through his messengers – angels and prophets – "Do not be afraid!" Jacob, Joshua, the Israelites, Zechariah, Mary, Elizabeth, the twelve disciples, and many others heard different versions of Jesus' command: "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:27).

Like God, we can help our children to acknowledge and to name their fears. Then we can teach them that "Do not be afraid!" is not a pie-in-the-sky statement, but a command issued by the Lord of the universe. We can tell them the story of Elisha the prophet who comforted his frightened servant when the king of Aram came against them with his vast army. Elisha said, "Don't be afraid. . . . Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." When Elisha prayed that God would open his servant's eyes, "he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (2 Kings 6:16, 17b). Also, we can point them to the Fear-Slayer who teaches us that "there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (I John 4:18). When our children understand the origin of fear and its antidote – God's abiding presence – they will be effectively armed with the weapon to conquer it. Then they will be able to begin a new year saying in their hearts, "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).

Next, be a dependable bridge. If bridges aren't trustworthy, those who attempt to use them will plummet from great heights and face many dangers. Kids need reliable bridges – solid adults – to help them cross over their fears. Children will perceive the deleterious actions of parents who let them down as additional "monster-fears" that need to be dealt with, besides the ones they face at school.

In the children's picture book *Mississippi Morning* Ruth Vander Zee relates the gripping story of a boy whose crossing bridge

Continued on page 16

Transitions

BuildingTrust
Vicky Van Andel Ed.

A new beginning

Summer is almost over. I am a bit sad about that because summer is my favorite time of year. I love everything about it and treasure each new day as it unfolds. My entire life I've held back from looking forward to my birthday in August, just to hang on to summer. To stretch the experience of sunshine and warmth, I've also learned to tell myself that winter does not start until after Christmas. It helps me enjoy each day of the fall, in spite of missing summer. It's amazing how beautiful each glorious autumn day can also be!

It's been a great summer here in Edmonton. July hit record highs and Alberta's wheat and canola fields were glorious. In my backyard a mass of black-eyed susies popped up unexpectedly, creating a sprawling orange array amidst a variety of perennials. Robins, bluejays and sparrows crowded our well-stocked bird house. It was a pleasure to behold.

The annual synodical meeting of the Christian Reformed Church seems to have taken place a long time ago. I attended it in June with two close friends from the east. We had a great time reminiscing our shared past, and the subsequent unfolding of our individual lives. We laughed at the same things we used to laugh about, and at the same time discovered new dimensions to each other. We noticed how much we had grown and yet stayed so much the same. How paradoxical is that?

Synod decided to open all offices to women. It is a great step forward and I'm happy about it. I'm sad synod felt the need to compromise too. Synod officially honored the people – congregations and classes – who believe that the ordination of women is scripturally wrong, and gave official permission to continue this practice. I saw no need for that as no-one would be forced to ordain women. But it was a gesture to maintain unity. I understand that too. If the discussion had been about whether we need a square church building or a round one I'd compromise too. My problem is that this decision was about *people* – half the population.

I suppose that as long as the church maintains that both positions on women are biblical (to ordain and not to ordain) then the natural outcome of discussions will continue be in support of both positions. Clearly the next step in the process towards full inclusion needs to be a blanket statement by the Christian Reformed Church supporting one position only, that of full inclusion. However, if unity continues to be the overriding principle, this won't happen for a while.

And so we move on. For better or for worse we could say. I am praying for all the women in congregations and classes where women are excluded. We all need to do this until all women are free to answer God's call. Women also need to step forward in droves to serve in ordained offices in all churches that embrace them. And so, here is a call to women to spread their gifts around!

On this note I end my *Building Trust* column in the *Christian Courier*. This is my last column. It has been wonderfully challenging to write a monthly column. I have been enriched and stimulated by the challenge of sharing my thoughts. I thank readers for their faithful support. I thank them also for their feedback. I'll never forget one particular faithful reader who sent me this email after one (apparently) particularly controversial column: "I am writing to let you know you have at least one friend." Encouragement comes in surprising packages. I am grateful to the editor of the *Christian Courier,* Harry, for giving me a flexible space to voice my ideas. You could say he had faith in me. I realize I may have been too outspoken for some people. However, it was the only approach I could take. Martin Luther's words "here I stand I can do no other" rings true for me when it comes to the struggle for freedom for women. I am grateful for having been given an avenue to express my convictions.

I've gotten to know the community better through this column. It has been exciting to meet people from across the country and hear how they appreciated a particular column. Some of you also worried about me, confiding that not everybody agrees with some of my on-the-edge ideas. All of it made it immensely satisfying challenge. Thank you.

One person suggested I continue writing about women. Perhaps about courageous women in the past who have influenced history in some way. Or maybe women in the Bible. I think it's a great idea but I don't have the time to do the research. For anyone interested in such a project here is a challenge!

And so, life moves on. Autumn will come and it will be beautiful. Winter also has its merits, though hard for me to grasp. I have hope for the future. Before I say goodbye, I want to share something about the work I do right now. I am a registered nurse in an inner-city detoxification centre. The clients I work with are addicted to all possible substances, morphine, crack, crystal meth, heroin or alcohol, to name a few. They stay at our facility for up to a week to get the substances safely out of their system. Over the past several years I have been exposed to a dimension of life I have never seen before. I work with the poorest and most deprived group of humanity. I am blessed by it. My work offers me the opportunity to put my beliefs about justice, freedom and equality into practice. I work from the heart and it is a privilege.

The group of women at synod who represented *A Cloud of Witnesses* made a banner on which people could write their thoughts and feelings. Women from the past and present who carried the torch through thick and thin, were honored on it. One woman dedicated her comments to her daughters and granddaughter. She is advocating for the next generation. I'm with her. The past is the memory on which the future unfolds. I wish the new generation well.

I will continue to enjoy the summer until it blends into fall, and from there into winter and spring, and then once again into a new and glorious summer!

Vicky 's email: vickyv@telus.net

Editor: *Thank you Vicky for your feisty contributions over the past years. So CC is open for volunteers and/or suggestions. We'd like to continue a page devoted to women's issues, though not necessarily exclusively. We could use another columnist who'll write from a personal view about life in their little nook of the world or to give a personal perspective on issues of interest to everyone. We shy away from the overly moralistic and the faith dimension should not be forced.*

Note: *The Building Trust in last month's column was written by Pastor George Vanderweit. We regret the omission of his name.*

Bridge *. . . continued from p. 15*

– his dad – collapses, with tragic, lifelong consequences. James William is naive about the escalating racial tensions in the rural southern community where he lives in 1933. Although he's used to white and coloured people being treated differently by adults, he feels no such barriers with his coloured friend, LeRoy, and assumes that his parents feel the same way about coloured people.

So, he's shocked when he discovers that his father condoned the burning of the coloured preacher's house. Later, James William learns about the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. His efforts to discuss the topic with his father prove to be fruitless. One morning James William gets up early to do chores and sees an eerie white-robed person running toward the house. When the person stumbles, his hood lifts up and James William sees his father's face; in that horrible moment his crossing bridge is destroyed. He says of their shattered relationship, "He never spoke to me about that morning. I never asked. I couldn't find the words . . . I still loved my pa. But I never really looked into his eyes again. And he never really looked into mine" (Eerdmans, 2004).

How can we, who are aware of our own weaknesses and sins, be dependable crossing bridges for our children as they navigate the fears associated with a new school year? By remaining rooted in God's word and by praying for daily strength, we can function in that role. Also, when "monsters" in our homes – broken marital relationships, discord between parents and children, substance abuse, financial problems, or any other forms of brokenness and stress – threaten to destroy our role as bridges for our kids, it's imperative that we seek help. Domestic stress will affect our children's academic lives and must be addressed.

Finally, tell your children about times when you were afraid so that they'll understand that all people struggle with fears and that you empathize with them. In an age-appropriate way explain to them what the chaplain in Geraldine Brook's novel *March* says so poignantly as he confronts the terrifying consequences of the American Civil War: "Who is the brave man – he who feels no fear? If so, then bravery is but a polite term for a mind devoid of rationality and imagination. The brave man, the real hero, quakes with terror, sweats, feels his very bowels betray him, and in spite of this moves forward to do the act he dreads" (Viking, 2005, pp. 168).

Help your children to see that fear is a fact of life no matter if people are five or fifty-years-old, but it is what we do with our fears that counts. For example, I told some of my children that initially when I was invited to visit Rocky Christian School in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta for three days to share my stories and dramas with them, I was scared to go. I had never before given workshops for that length of time. But through the prayers and encouragement of friends and God's sustaining power, I was able to go. While there, I read one of my stories, "Dancing With the Fence Post," to the older students. One of the characters, 13-year-old Foggie, says to the old woman, Alevina, "Last night I got scared because my sister was sick again. It got me to thinking that I need to grow up, to be a real adult, to not be afraid." Alevina replies, "Ah, I could tell you a thing or two about fear and adults. They're more familiar with each other than you might be realizing" (*Choices: A Short Story Anthology for Christian Schools*, published by The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, 1994, pp. 45).

When I read the story to the students, I could have pretended that I didn't struggle with fears. But instead I told them that I had initially been afraid to visit their school. I also said that the first time I visited a school I was so afraid I asked to sit down the entire time as I read to the students because of my trembling legs.

How are you and fear familiar with each other? Would it be beneficial for your child to hear your story as he or she anticipates challenges in the upcoming school year? If so, share the gift of your story. As you do so, you'll have the opportunity to proclaim God's faithfulness.

September is here – and so are the fears that accompany it. Be the crossing bridge that God has called you to be for your child and for the Father's glory.

Editor's Note: *I realize that most of our readers no longer have kids starting school, but sometimes grandmothers and grandfathers play a big role as bridges in the lives of their grandchildren, so I thought Sonya's article still counts for us. Moreover, we can help one another bridge other fears, even more powerful.*

"Hey Coach!"

Bob Zomermaand

"Gentlemen, this is a football." So began the first practice at training camp for the Green Bay Packers every year that Vince Lombardi was the coach. Even when his teams had won the Super Bowl the prior season, he took them back to the very basic ideas of the game of football as they began to prepare for the season ahead. The legendary coach knew something that most of us forget. One has to go back to the basics again and again if one is to excel in anything. Coach Lombardi would annually teach his world class athletes the fundamentals of the game. The learning was never done for his teams. And they excelled for years.

If you and I were to name off as many great sports names as we can: Sidney Crosby, Alex Rodriguez, Steve Nash, Tiger Woods, or many, many more, we would discover that every one of these people have something in common. They all have a coach. Even people who have reached the pinnacle of their sport have coaches. They see the need for having someone who can help them work on their game so that they are just that much better. Natural talent only goes so far. After that, a great deal of coaching and training is required.

What I find so disconcerting is that churches do not see the need for their pastors to have coaches with whom they work. I doubt that there is any church in all of North America that does not have at least one parent among the parishioners who is working with someone to coach them in a sport. It is a fact of life that we readily accept. A young athlete's performance is greatly improved with the help of a good coach. In fact, if it were true that coaching makes no difference, we would not see so many coaches fired at the end of a disappointing season. Why do we think that pastors, men and women who have natural skills and some carefully developed ones, have no need of a coach to assist their personal and professional growth?

Let me give you an example. I was chatting with a young woman who is working on her PhD in sport psychology. She is studying the theory and practice of great coaching in the sports field. She herself was a finely tuned athlete in high school and college. She now, alongside her studies, coaches kids in soccer. We came to the subject of her church and she said, "I wish I could coach my pastor in his presentation skills!"

"How would you do that?" was my response.

She replied, "Well, it is not his content that needs work. It is how he presents it. He takes great material and makes it dull by how he presents it. I would coach him in understanding audience dynamics, in how to keep their attention, and how to take his gift for articulation to a much greater level!"

When asked why she did not approach him to do just that, she got a strained look on her face and said, "But he would be so offended if anyone were to offer to coach him, wouldn't he?"

It is unfortunate that she did not take the opportunity to do that, for now two years later, her pastor has been forced to resign from the church she had been attending. The problem? His presentation skills in worship were lacking to the point where the church could no longer tolerate his style.

I am concerned that we are going to keep losing pastors to the problems that arise, not from lack of spiritual vitality or moral failure, but from a lack of coaching toward the highly polished skills that are demanded by churches in North America today. In addition, we are going to be losing a large number of pastors to retirement as the boomers turn 55, 60, and 65. I believe that we could do the church a great blessing by recognizing both those truths.

I suggest that these older men and women who are reaching retirement be hired as coaches for younger members of the clergy. It would make for a far more effective pastoral corps and a better utilized group of retirees whose coaching skills would be a blessing to the next generation of pastors. The difference from a mentoring relationship is that the coach is paid for the work while a mentor is rarely compensated.

In my own experience of over thirty years as a pastor, I have personally sought out coaching for myself. At the 8-10 year mark of my ministry, I spent one day a week for two academic years going to a seminary for an advanced degree that focused on coaching in the skills of ministry. For about a six-year stretch I was a part of a group of 12-15 pastors who got together with a coach who taught us how to handle pastoral issues. Another two-year stretch was spent going to a monthly coaching gathering to work on personal and professional skills in our lives. This included a private, monthly two-hour coaching meeting that helped me to personally apply the skills.

I believe that if we are going to sustain pastoral excellence, we need to make a church culture shift toward personal and skill coaching for our pastors. This shift will require several major modifications in how we think as a church culture. The first and obvious one is a reversal of thinking at the congregational level that this is too costly. The second is the need for the congregation to learn that a pastor will be less offended by the offer of a coach than a request to resign. The third is a change in the mental attitude of those pastors who do take offense if someone says they need coaching.

It amazes me that we take for granted the work of personal coaches in athletics, but take offense at the suggestion that pastors also need a coach. Is it really true that churches would rather pay six to twelve months of severance to their former pastor and deal with the aftermath than pay someone the equivalent of a one-month salary each year to coach their pastor?

What advantages are there to having a "Retired Pastor-Coach" (RPC), assist some of our current pastors? I think the following are immediately apparent:

- The RPC knows how tough the job is and does not come to the pastor and say, "You've got it easy working only one day a week."
- The RPC is not a member of the local congregation and isn't going to fire the pastor for not measuring up to expectations.
- The RPC can coach six or seven others and still have plenty of time to enjoy retirement.
- The RPC can give an objective opinion on how a pastor has handled a difficult council decision or on how one could improve bedside manners.
- The RPC can return repeatedly to the basics and remind the pastor, "The important thing is how you handle the Word of God."

I challenge each of you who read this to consider how to assist your pastor to get coaching so that your church will be blessed.

New Grant for Pastoral Excellence

Lilly Endowment Inc. has awarded a second grant to the CRC for Sustaining Pastoral Excellence:

- a total of $1 million
- beginning in January 2008
- for five years
- focusing on peer learning groups, support for pastors' spouses, learning events for pastoral couples

For more information about the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Project, please contact us:
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SUSTAINING Pastoral EXCELLENCE

Made possible in the Christian Reformed Church through a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc.

Reflections

Welcome to my perch
Bert Witvoet

A blue mascot in a blue library

Before Alice and I started out this August on our almost annual trip out west to visit four of our five children, I realized I had better climb into my computer and get this column out on time. I asked the editor whether it would be alright to do one more South Africa story. He said, "By all means." "This time my story is about a library," I told him. Seeing that Harry der Nederlanden is a bibliophile from way back, that sounded like music in his ears.

The setting

The library I decided to write about is a very special library. It's a library that did not exist before we arrived in Masia. Masia is a village about 30 kilometers south of Makhado in the Limpopo province. Theocentric Christian College (K to 12) is located some kilometers west of the actual village, on land donated by the chief of the Matsila people. Theocentric is a partner school to two Christian schools in Smithville, Ontario. In its information brochure you can find under the heading "Affiliations" the following: The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (Canada), Worldwide Christian Schools International (Canada), Covenant Christian School (Canada), and Smithville District Christian High School (Canada). The ties with Canada are very strong here.

The principal of Theocentric, Mr. Wilson Mandende, had invited eight Canadian educators to organize a teachers conference for several Limpopo Christian schools. That was initially the main reason for our educational mission trip to South Africa sponsored by Worldwide Christian Schools. But Marc and Dora Stroobosscher, who had been at Theocentric twice before, told the rest of the Ontario team, Ike and Jennie Witteveen and Alice and myself, that Theocentric needed a library. And a library, as everyone knows, needs books. So we team members started to organize a book drive in our respective communities, at public and Christian schools, various stores, as well as our community libraries and churches. Altogether we collected 1500 books – some fiction, but mostly non-fiction. The Smithville schools paid for the airfreight of these 1500 books.

A daunting task

Sure enough, when we arrived at Theocentric on April 2 of this year, the 20 or so boxes were sitting in the corner of an empty double classroom. They were shouting at us: "We got here before you!" "Yes," I muttered, "thanks to the Smithville schools and the principal of Theocentric." The latter had accompanied a friend in his "bakkie" (pick-up truck) as they drove to the Johannesburg airport to pick up the precious books from Canada the Saturday before we came. Ignoring the taunt of the books, we nevertheless felt the weight of the challenge before us. How could we turn this empty room into a functional library in the span of three weeks?

The bulk of the work would rest on the shoulders of Jennie and Alice. Both of them had studied the Dewey Decimal Classification system before coming to South Africa as well as talking to librarians and visiting the Belleville Christian School library. It was almost comical to see the two of them step into this cavernous room and survey the empty space. The floor, they noticed, was like many other floors in South African rondavels, hard-packed dirt smoothened out with cow dung. But you could not tell it was cow dung by sniffing the air. Actually, some of us could remember that our parents were familiar with that kind of wall and floor preparation in rural Holland.

Alice and Jennie start the sorting.

The first thing we did, however, was call on some grade twelve learners who were at school in spite of the holidays. This being the critical year of matriculation for them, they were getting special tutoring from a few dedicated teachers, while all the other learners were at home twiddling their thumbs. We asked the senior students to help us move four shelving units from another classroom on campus to the empty hall, initially intended for a computer science lab. The boys were particularly eager to show off their strength in front of the girls, the steel units being quite heavy. Once the units were set up, the work of organizing the books could begin.

Communal effort

Fortunately for Jennie and Alice the plans of the rest of us, who were intending to spend most of our time working with teachers, were sabotaged by the Lord. As it turned out, we could not spend the week following the conference with teachers if we stood on our heads, for the simple reason that these people were still on vacation for one more week. Someone had forgotten to tell us about that little detail. Now what? We thought this would be a waste of our time. But no, the Lord knew that Alice and Jennie could not possibly finish their task alone. They needed and got our help for a whole week. All of us, including Principal Mandende, pulled up our sleeves and socks and started placing the books in piles according to subject matter – history with history, religion with religion, science with science. And we glued pockets and pasted labels to these books.

It was drudgery up to a point. Yet we had lots of fun doing the work, as we told each other stories, sang songs and enjoyed coffee breaks and lunches.

During one lunch break, I told my friends about a politically very incorrect song I used to sing in the fifties about a white man being cooked in a pot by cannibals, and how the cannibals were feasting so hard that they did not notice that the white man had burned to a crisp, much to their sorrow. The song was in Dutch, and I actually sang it for them. The song ended with the pseudo-romantic picture of the twilight rays of the moon settling over the land and the carnivorous villagers setting the alarm clock for an early rising, as they ended up going to bed with an empty stomach. The moral of the story was: they should have eaten first and then celebrate; repentance usually follows after the sin. A moving and deeply stirring spiritual truth!

Grade 12 boys bring a shelf unit.

Different times

The story sounded so incongruous in our environment, however. Here we were in the heart of southern Africa as white visitors feeling quite comfortable with our black friends. No doubt, if anyone had bothered to check my Frisian past, they would have discovered a few cannibals there as well. We almost take pride in having murdered the evangelist monk and bishop St. Boniface way back in 754, in the hoary days of Radbod, king of Frisia. After all, we Frisians love our freedom too much. Personally, I think that had Boniface been Protestant, we would have received him with open arms. The problem with Roman Catholicism, as far a the Frisians were concerned, is that they have a pope. And the Roman empire had an emperor. Frisians dislike hierarchies.

But I digress. So much has happened to our consciousness over the last fifty years that we dare not sing songs that have a whiff of racism attached to them. As we sat there in the library-designate of Theocentric, I could not believe that we lustily sang those songs in the 1950s. Actually I learned that song from an uncle who had studied at the University of Leiden. It's a good thing that the stereotypes of the past have been swallowed up by current sensitivities.

After this week of communal effort, when school holidays were over, Marc, Dora, Ike and I focused on working with teachers, visiting other schools, while Aljce and Jenniee slaved away in the fetus-like library. Once in a while they got help from a group of girls who showed interest in the process of making a library, but the lion share rested on their shoulders.

Blue Gum furniture

Of course, all this time we knew that the actual library shelves would take up only half of the room. What could we do with the rest of the room? The Stroobosschers came up with the bright idea of asking a lawn furniture maker to build us six tables and 36 chairs, which would turn the other half of the room into a study hall or conference room. The furniture maker, Christo, happens to live on the same farm where we rented our cottages. He is the brother of the owner of the farm. Both men are Afrikaners with Portuguese blood in them as well. In fact, their great-great-grandfather, a Joao Albisini, was a Portuguese adventurer, who expanded commercial interests on behalf of Portugal along the eastern African seaboard. This man ended up joining forces with the Shangaans, a southern African tribe, and he became the only white man ever to become a tribal chief. The dam that created the man-made lake we were on was called the Albisini Dam.

On April 14, I rode with Christo in his bakkie as he delivered the first two tables and 12 armchairs to Theocentric. The items had been made from Seligna wood from the Blue Gum trees that grew on the farm. They looked dignified in the library. By the time the rest of the tables and chairs were delivered a week or so later, the library was finished and the conference section was in

Business Directory

Christo gets help unloading his "bakkie."

use. We gave two evening workshops for boards there, and learners and staff loved to come and do some reading or research at those handsome new tables. To put the icing on the cake, we asked Christo to build a desk for the librarian. A brand new computer for the librarian, financed by, who else, Covenant Christian Schools, completed the project. A job posting was put up for senior learners and seven were "hired " as librarian assistants. Dora Stroobosscher led them in a training session on the " ins and outs" of the Dewey Decimal System and on keeping the shelves neat. Part of their job also includes cleaning the library every Friday.

The pride of Masia

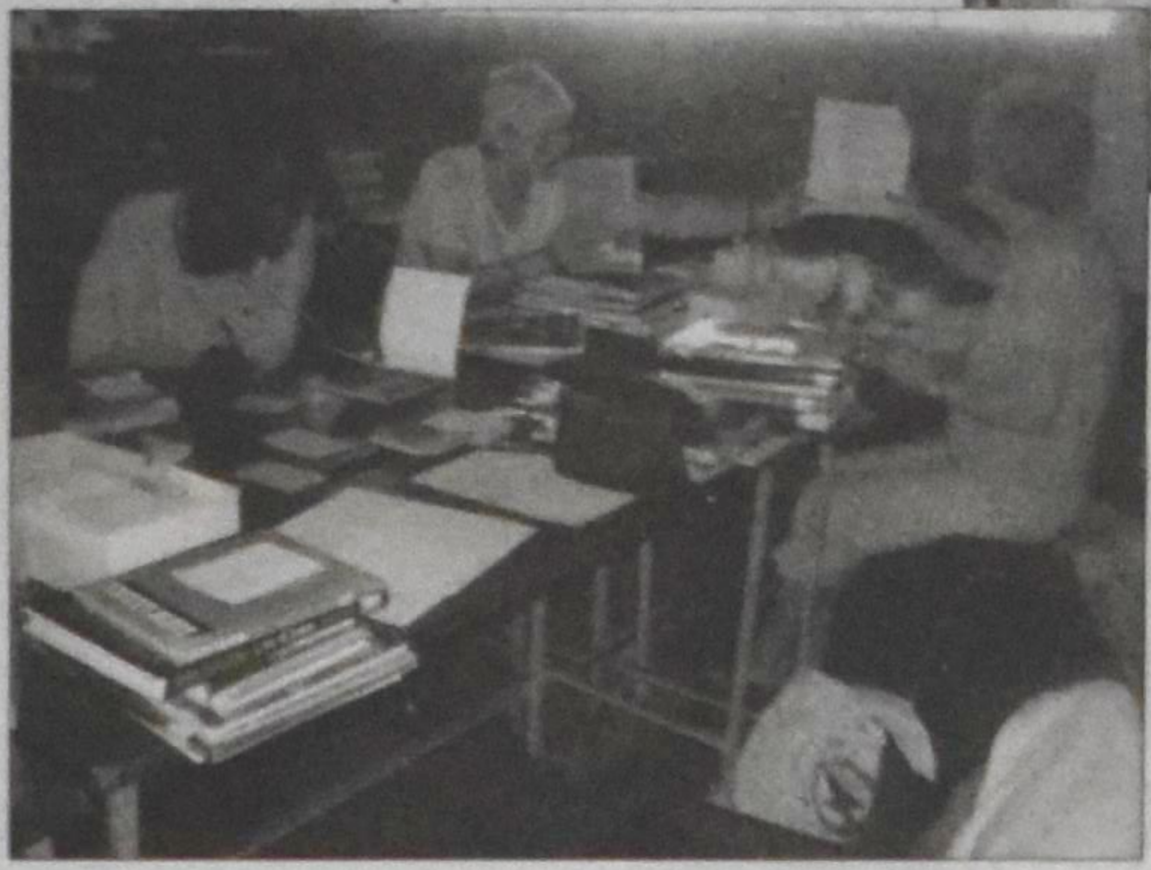
Principal Wilson Mandende was ecstatic about the new acquisition at his school. The chief of the village had to come and see the new library. He insisted on meeting the Canadian visitors a few days later. Whenever prospective parents came to the school, they were introduced to Jennie and Alice, and they could walk through the aisles to see rows of books. Later on, a parent volunteer signed up as the new librarian for the school.

You must know that this library at Theocentric is the only school library in a radius of probably 100 kilometers. In fact, most schools in the Limpopo province, public or private, do not have a library. Mr. Mandende was so proud of his library that he decided to paint the metal edging of the shelves blue one Saturday, to match the clown mascot that Thea, the wife of farmer Joao, had donated to the school. The clown held a sign that read: "Shhhh! Quiet please!" Now the shelving unit matched the clown! To paint those shelves was one of those delightful impulses on the part of the principal that showed not only his attention to detail but also his childlike enthusiasm for this gift of a library to his school.

And that's the story of a blue library with a blue mascot and with furniture made from the Blue Gum tree situated near the village of Masia, somewhere in the Limpopo province of South Africa.

On the day of our farewell, the day that the library was officially opened, Dora Stroobosscher, in front of staff, learners and parents, unveiled a banner with all the names of the students of SDCH and Covenant on it. Some of us gave a little speech. I told them the story of how the elephant got its nose, by Rudyard Kipling. "The curious little elephant went to the Limpopo River to ask the crocodile what it has for dinner…." If you want to know the rest of the story, you can find it in the book by Rudyard Kipling, which stands on the shelves of the new library at Theocentric Christian College, 100 kilometers south of the Limpopo River.

Mr. Mandende helps Jennie and Alice



Learners show their approval of the new library and furniture.

A look at the finished library. Marc is taking pictures and Ike looks around.

Bert Witvoet is the former editor of CC, now retired, who stays active by editing the Christian Educators Journal and preaching the occasional sermon.

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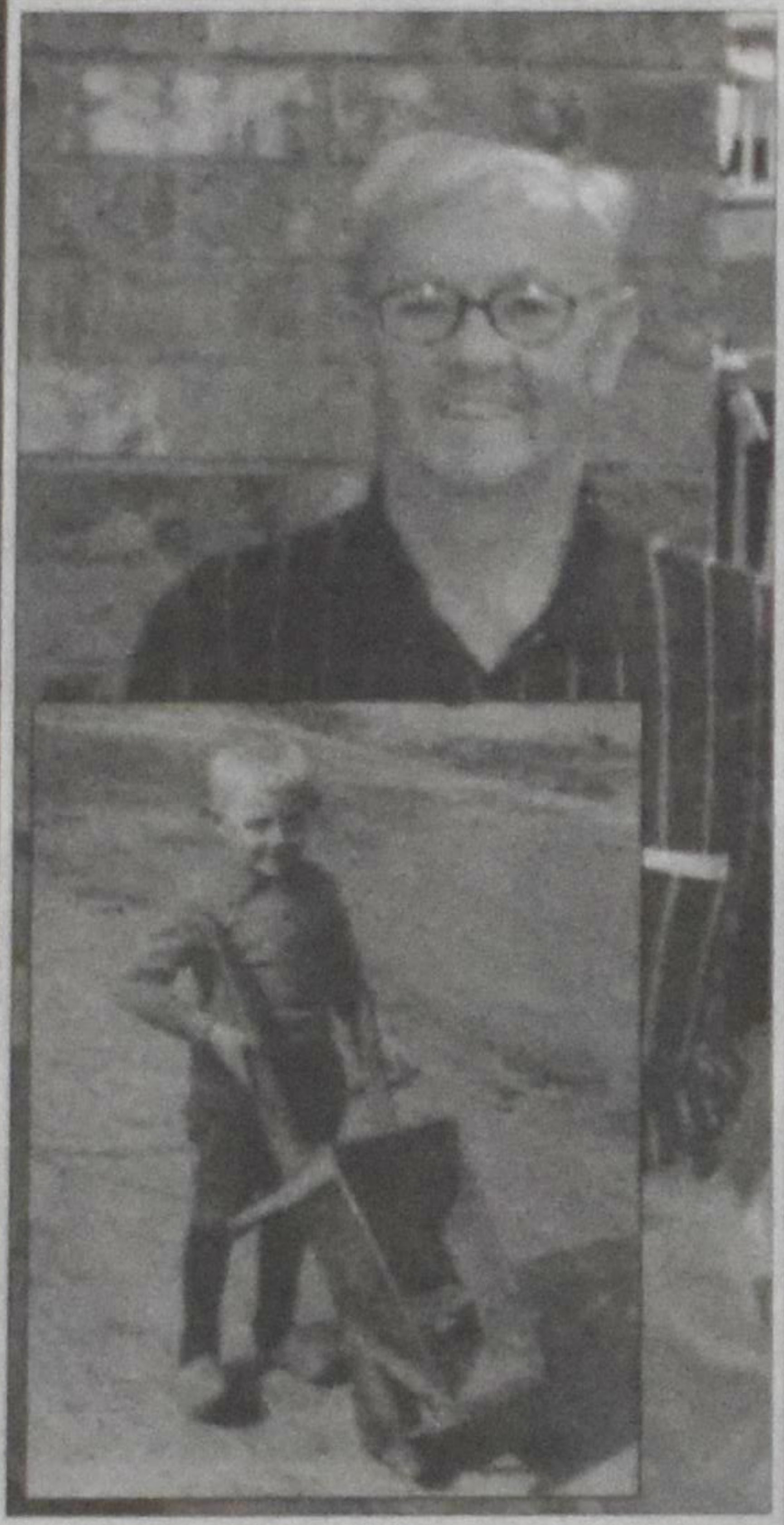
Classifieds

Birthday



Happy 75th Birthday!!

Jack Terpstra

born August 31, 1932 in Westerbork, Holland
Enjoy your day on us!!
We thank God for you and look forward to many more years together.

With love from your wife Liz, and children
Theo & Cindy (Alaina, Vanessa), Sylvia (Karl), Jerry & Beth (Michelle and Jennifer), and James & Kari (Rebekah, Nathan, Jonah).

Retirement and Anniversary

'Great is Thy Faithfulness'

The congregation of the Heritage Fellowship CRC in Brampton, glorifies the Heavenly Father for his love and faithfulness to our pastor

Peter Van Egmond and his wife Jenny,

as they embark on their retirement after **50 years in the ministry**.

The church will say farewell on Sunday the 16th of September, starting at 10 a.m. with a church service, and a coffee social afterward.

We pray that God will continue to bless them both, as they enter a new chapter of their lives.

Correspondence may be sent to:
hfchurch@sympatico.ca
Telephone: 905.459.8493

"Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary"

The Van Kampen and the Van Deemter families congratulate

Rev. Peter Van Egmond and his wife Jenny

on the number of joyful celebrations.
We wish them continued well-being and happiness.
Also our heartfelt gratitude for the love and care, time and time again throughout the years.

Anniversaries

1957 August 30 2007

With joy and thankfulness to the Lord, we celebrate the **50th Anniversary** of our parents and grandparents

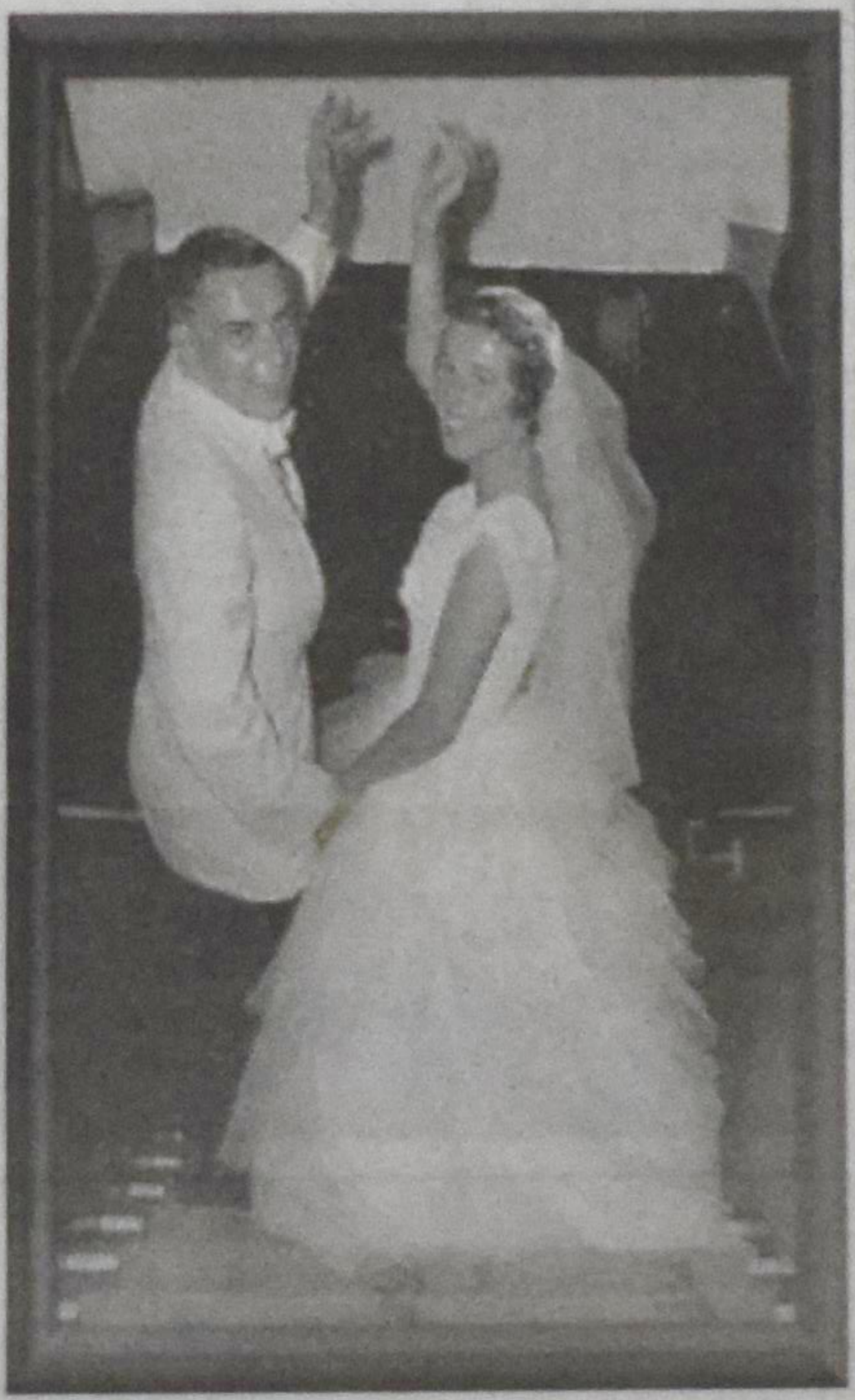
Henk and Jenny Van Eyk (nee **Scharft**)

May our God continue to bless you and keep you and be near you both.

With love from:
Marian & Ken (Kaitlyn, Sarah, Jacob)
Ron & Wendy (Melanie, Nikki, Kylie, Aaron)
Kelvin & Kim (Saskia, Jessica)
Greta & John (Chris, Johnathan, Kurt & Corinne)
Wendy & Arnie (Alesha, Joel, Luke, Rebekah, Stephen)

"God is Good"

Correspondence: Box 137, Fort Langley BC V1M 2R5



Congratulations to

Jacob and Gerdina (Weeber) Cappon

of Willowdale Ontario
on their **50th Wedding Anniversary**, August 31, 2007.

With love from your children and grandchildren:
Lynn & Mike Ferkranus, Matthew and Kristen
Bette-Ann & Tom Bruulsema, Colin, Laura and Timon
Dan & Terry Cappon, Noah and Lucas
Rob Cappon
Tim Cappon

Praise God for his faithfulness and blessings.

Obituaries

For God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children. 1 Peter 1:3-6

Aukien Bouwina (Alice) Zeyl

On July 30,2007, our beloved Mom and Oma went home to her Saviour at the age of 93. She was the wife of the late Wybe Zeyl, who predeceased her in 1992.

A resident of Shalom Manor in Grimsby for the last fifteen years, her deep faith and gentle spirit has been a gift to her five sons and their wives (Jack & Christel, Don & Judy, Jim & Alice, Thom & Aleida, and John (†1998) & Netty), her 21 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren.

Born Aukien Agema in Ureterp, the Netherlands, in 1913, she and her family emigrated to Canada in 1954. From 1959 until 1974 she was a much-loved teacher at the Sarnia Christian School.

A celebration of thanksgiving for her life took place in the chapel of Shalom Manor in Grimsby (15 Bartlett Ave.) on Thursday, August 2.

Her family wishes to thank in particular the staff of Shalom Manor for all the years of loving care she has received.

Correspondence: Jack Zeyl, 153 Springfield Blvd, Ancaster ON L9K 1H8

Sinderen, Gelderland, NL - July 25, 1915
Grimsby, ON - July 31, 2007

Psalm 145:18
The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him.

At Shalom Manor, Grimsby, our Lord in his infinite wisdom, mercy and love, called home

Aleida Catharina Buesink (nee **Lammers**)

beloved wife of the late John Buesink (1906-1982)
Dear mother of
Betsy & Warner Boer, *Simcoe*
Joanne & Vince van Dijk, *Hamilton*
Willy & Larry DeKoter, *London*
George & Marilyn Buesink, *Strathroy*
Lillian Buesink & the late John: 1945-1999, *Hamilton*
Murray & Denise Buesink, *Lethbridge, AB*
Fred & Marianne Buesink, *Burnaby, BC*
Ena & Bastian De Peuter, *Thunder Bay*
Bernice & Stan Baker, *Oshawa*
Also loved by 38 grandchildren (predeceased by one grandson – 1963) and 38 great-grandchildren.
Survived by two sisters-in-law.

The funeral took place in Strathroy, ON

The following poem was found among Mom's personal keepsakes:

Eens breekt de gulden lamp aan stuk
Voorbij is dan al 't aards geluk
Maar hallelujah! Dan begint
Eens 't ware leven voor God's kind.
O, wat zal 't zijn volmaakt en rein
Voor eeuwig met de Heer te zijn?
Als ook mijn lied Hem hulde biedt
Neen, zulk een sterven vrees ik niet.

Correspondence address: B. Boer, 26 Elm St Simcoe ON N3Y 3B3

Kristje (Christine) Sjaarda

on Saturday July 21, 2007 at Shalom Manor in Grimsby.

Christine Sjaarda (nee Bakker) was called home to be with her Lord and Saviour, in her 98th year.

Beloved wife of the late Wilfred Sjaarda.

Loving mother of
Hilly & the late Diedert Schilstra *of Smithville*,
Gay & Bob Schotanus *of Fonthill*,
Willy & Richard Zantingh *of Dunnville*,
Pierre & and Martha Sjaarda *of St. Anns*,
Aafke Haveman *of Fruitland* and
Wayne & Gertie Sjaarda *of the Netherlands*.
Cherished grandmother of 35 grandchildren, 86 great-grandchildren, and 2 great-great-grandchildren.

The funeral service was held on July 25 at Wellandport CRC with Rev. Andres Zantingh officiating.
Psalm 27

Correspondence: Hilly Schilstra
Box 866 - 6183 Townline Rd
Smithville ON L0R 1Y0

A DUTCH SERVICE

will be held in the

Ancaster
Christian Reformed Church
at 3:00 p.m.
September 2

Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

Classifieds

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Smithers – CFBV	9:15 am	1230
Vernon – CJIB	9:30 pm	94
ALBERTA		
Brooks – CIBQ	8:30 am	1340
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Winnipeg – CKJS	9:00 am	810
ONTARIO		
Atikokan – CFAK	9:30 am	1240
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Hamilton – CHAM	7:30 am	820
London – CKSL	7:00 am	1410
Owen Sound – CFOS	7:00 am	560
Sarnia – CHOK	7:30 am	1070
Stratford – CJCS	8:45 am	1240
Wingham – CKNX	10:30 am	920
Woodstock – CJFH	7:30 am	94.03
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Events

August 30, 2007 12:15 p.m.

Stephanie Burgoyne and William Vandertuin in recital.

Organ Solos and "Organ four Hands"
At Trinity Anglican Church, Cambridge, Ontario at 12.15.

A DUTCH SERVICE will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. **September 2**
Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

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Events/Advertising

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Sep 2 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

Sep 29 Netherlands Bazaar, **Thornhill** Community Centre. See ad for details.

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Co Vanderlaan

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News

Are extreme weather and global warming linked?

Brad Knickerbocker

The headlines this summer seem ominous: "Extreme Weather Plagues Globe in 2007".... "Across Globe, Extremes of Heat and Rain".... "Insurers Claim Global Warming Makes Some Regions Too Hot to Handle".... "Floating Arctic ice shrinking at record rate".... "The World Meteorological Organization reports on extreme weather and climate events."

But is global warming to blame? Maybe. Maybe not.

In any case, reports the World Meteorological Organization, "Weather and climate are marked by record extremes in many regions across the world since January 2007."

"In January and April 2007 it is likely that global land surface temperatures ranked warmest since records began in 1880.... [It is] very likely that hot extremes, heat waves and heavy precipitation events will continue to become more frequent." "The agency found that climate warming was unequivocally and most likely 'due to human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels'," reports CNN.

Among the evidence cited by the UN's meteorological agency, according to CNN:

"Four monsoon depressions, double the normal number, caused heavy flooding in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.... England and Wales have experienced their wettest May-to-July period since record-keeping started in 1766.... Late last month in Sudan, floods and heavy rain caused 23,000 mud brick homes to collapse, killing at least 62 people...." Meanwhile, reports the BBC, "Arctic sea ice is expected to retreat to a record low by the end of this summer."

Citing measurements from the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC), the BBC reports that this summer is likely to end with the lowest ice cover on record.

"If you look at data for the first week in August, we are way below what we saw in 2005," explained Mark Serreze, a senior research scientist at the NSIDC. "So unless something really changes, for example the Arctic suddenly becomes a lot colder, it is going to be hard not to beat the previous record."

But as Agence France-Presse reports, one summer of bumptious weather does not confirm global warming. "...Establishing a link between climate change and extreme weather is a controversial matter.... Scientists caution there is not enough evidence to blame global warming for recent extreme weather, and there are those who say there is no proof that extreme weather events are becoming more frequent."

The storm that drenched New Jersey and then pounded New York City, for example, "was strong but not particularly rare for a hot summer day," Pennsylvania State University meteorologist Jeff Warner told the Associated Press.

"Climate scientist James Hansen, director of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies, agreed: 'You cannot blame a single specific event, such as [last] week's storm, on climate change,' he said. 'However,' he added, 'it is fair to ask whether the human changes have altered the likelihood of such events. There the answer seems to be 'yes.' "Experts often point out that long-term climate and short-term weather (which may be affected by other natural events, such as sea temperature and El Niño) are not the same. With climate, the longer view is more important. Citing a new study from Britain's Met Office, MSNBC reports that "Global warming will slow during the next few years but then speed up again."

"There is ... particular interest in the coming decade, which represents a key planning horizon for infrastructure upgrades, insurance, energy policy and business development,' Douglas Smith and his co-authors noted. The real heat will start after 2009, they said." Speaking of insurers, generally a conservative lot when it comes to figuring the odds of having to pay claims, Scientific American warns that "as the nation braces for an active hurricane season, private insurers jump ship, leaving federal and state governments liable for ever increasing payouts."

"If circumstances change due to global warming that alter the level of risk, insurance companies need to be free to reflect that risk," says David Snyder, vice president and assistant general counsel for the American Insurance Association (AIA). "The reality is that in some places the risk is so severe that [these locations] are uninsurable."

July 2007 Jakarta – Five days of incessant rains left more than 430,000 people displaced and 50 dead.

Children cool off in front of their house as temperatures reached 42C in Belgrade.

Guilt relief in global warming

Carbon offsets, or paying others to fight climate change, are still in doubt. Who checks up on these programs? A new trend is to become a zero-sum contributor of greenhouse gases ("carbon neutral"). Some people avoid the lifestyle change, however, and instead purchase "offsets." But do such buy-offs really make a difference? Yes and no.

The idea behind carbon offsets is simple: Make a contribution to any project that reduces greenhouse gases, such as a tree-planting scheme or a business that captures methane from landfills, and thus compensate for one's personal additions to global warming.

Spend enough money and your conscience seems clear as regards being responsible for climate change.

The World Bank estimates that the global market in voluntary offsets, by both businesses and individuals, grew to about $100 million in 2006, and will rise again this year. Last month, for instance, the US Forest Service announced a Carbon Capture Fund that will sell offsets to individuals. Since trees absorb CO_2, the fund will underwrite tree-planting in Idaho, Montana, and South Dakota. Buyers will first use a "carbon calculator" to measure how much their activities at home, on transportation, at leisure, or on the job produce greenhouse gases, and then pay a certain amount to have seedlings planted in treeless areas. A small family, for instance, might pay under $200 per year, depending on its lifestyle.

Another attempt to sell offsets is General Electric's "Earth Rewards" credit card. Up to one percent of each purchase with the card is used to fund programs that claim to reduce greenhouse gases.

Using offsets has been criticized as an easy way to relieve "carbon guilt" without making changes in one's daily use of fossil fuels that would reduce emissions directly. Offsets are likened to indulgences the Roman Catholic church once gave to those who paid to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in 1517 – buy a pardon for sins. (The campaign's slogan: "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.") The practice was criticized by Martin Luther, helping to ignite the Protestant Reformation.

Carbon offsetters, however, face a different challenge. Can they be sure a project really reduces emissions? Will that reforestation really happen or, even if it does, was it going to happen anyway? How can one check on a new, supposedly more efficient power plant in, say, China? Will the CO_2 savings be measured accurately?

Global rules on offsets don't exist, although the Climate Group, a coalition of businesses and local governments, plans to set voluntary standards soon.

No doubt charlatans need to be shaken out of many offset programs. But that shouldn't stop those who want to help from doing so. As always, it's buyer beware: Investigate before you buy, and follow up. And keep offsets local, if possible.

Carbon offsets should remain the last leg on a three-legged stool for supporting efforts against global warming. First comes personal conservation, then pushing industry and government to change policies. After that, one can indulge in soothing carbon guilt by shopping carefully for offsets. And why stop at breaking even? Some may want to go beyond carbon neutrality.

Bear in mind that doing one's bit for global warming can't simply be bought like a license to keep doing business as usual. Personal sacrifice in energy use is still the best path to saving the planet.